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THE STREET OF TO-DAY

THE STREET OF TO-DAY

BY
JOHN MASEFIELD, 1872 -



*By the Street of To-day
Man goes to the House of To-morrow*

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To LUCY

O beauty, I have wandered far;
Peace, I have suffered seeking thee:
Life, I have sought to see thy star
That other men might see.

And after wandering nights and days,
A gleam in a beloved soul
Shows how life's elemental blaze
Goes wandering through the whole,

Bearing the discipline of earth
That earth, controlled, may bring forth flowers.
O may our labours help the birth
Of nobler souls than ours.

July 6th, 1909.

August 13th, 1910.

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MASS.

THE STREET OF TO-DAY

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

LIONEL HESELTINE sat at dinner between a sporting lady and a Dean's daughter. He talked to the sporting lady about the diseases of "toy Poms," gravely telling her to inject corrosive sublimate. To the Dean's daughter, who was as idle as the other, but less vivacious, he imparted the laws of Mendel in relation to the sweet-pea. He was not constantly employed in these ways. Sometimes both ladies were engaged with the men beyond them. At such times he surveyed the guests, gravely smiling, while his long, brown, clinical fingers rolled minute bread-pills under the table.

The dinner was a small one, for, though there were more than twenty people present, thirteen of them were members of the family. The host was his old chief, Sir Patrick Hamlin. The guests were mostly bright young persons of the kind beloved by the old, for their looks and gaiety. Looking down the table, Lionel saw only one face which impressed him. The rest had no faces; they had only coloured flesh, bright eyes, and good teeth. Lady Hamlin was out of sight behind the flowers in the great Spanish vases. Old Sir Patrick's grim mug was hidden by the head of the lady who was talking to him. There was a profusion of old silver everywhere. The food and wine did more credit to Sir Patrick's income than to his position as a scientist.

Looking down the table, Lionel wondered at the want of faces. That was the only want. There were no faces; except the one face, far down, on the opposite side of the table.

The sporting lady turned to ask him if he would enter for a "mixed foursome" to be played at Sandwich, on the following Sunday. One of the men had sprained his wrist, and another man was wanted badly. Lionel was sorry, but he could not come. The links were awfully good, were they not? Yes, and you could get there and back so easily. Really, the sporting lady did not know how one had lived before motors. Lionel, looking at her, wondered at the restlessness of the life which had made her face feverish and hard at the same time. He wondered to what depths of selfishness one could sink in a life of "playing the game." He could not tell. He thought that if this lady, with the hard eyes, and the hard mouth, and pretty hair, took a fancy, she would stick at nothing to gratify it. She was bright, she was clever, she was capable. Yet her face was not a soul's index; there was no character in it; only a desire to be gratified, in some expensive, correct, and foolish way. She wished to be amused. Looked at for more than two seconds, she displayed the sign of a secret bitterness at not being amused enough.

There was the same air of feverish weariness in the face of the Dean's daughter. It was the familiar face of one who has been taught accomplishments and amusements at high pressure, in preparation, not for life, but for society. Glancing at the Dean's daughter, as her hard little laugh thanked him for a jest, he wondered what the real woman might be, under the mask, under all the accomplishment, the music and the games. He wondered what would reveal the real woman. Nothing very grand, he thought. He was not sure. This face was stronger than the other. It

asked, not for amusement, but for its own way, an easy way, but still its own. Somehow, he could not see a possible old age for either woman. Neither would marry. They were the feminine of subaltern, without the subaltern's chance of promotion.

In a lull, which reminded him of the sudden stopping of fire in an engagement, he looked down the table again, at the face which had impressed him. It was that of a woman of about forty-seven, in the prime of life. She was the only guest of mature years, since he, who evidently came next to her in age, was not yet thirty. She sat between a young soldier, and a slight, hatchet-faced man, whom Lionel knew to be Maunsel, a naval lieutenant, Sir Patrick's sister's son. The sailor, who was a clever talker, was amusing her. The soldier, who seemed puzzled, was fonder of his other neighbour.

She was tall, for a woman. She was beautiful from character, not from feature. Her eyes, which were large and dark, gave the face earnestness and pathos at the same time. The mouth was large, but with a play upon it singularly winning. The nose was rather small, but with the broad, flat base of so many intellectual heads. The ears were small. The eyebrows dark and thick. The brow royal. The hair was heaped up above the brow in a great dark mass. The face was rather pale. Its expression, to the casual observer, was thoughtful and dreamy. The casual observer did not heed the great eyes burning and the vivacity of the play of the mouth.

Lionel could not be sure that she wore a wedding ring. He could not see her left hand. She could hardly be married, he thought, since there was no one there who could be her husband. "She is a fine enough spirit to have a tragical marriage," he said to himself. The next instant, he was discussing dancing with the Dean's daughter. "So she was dancing at the Mara-

bouts? ” “ Yes, and it is great fun. I’ve just learned the wiggle-waggle. Do you know the wiggle-waggle? ”

“ The single wiggle-waggle? It’s like this, isn’t it? ” He mimicked the step with drumming fingers. She laughed.)

“ That’s only the single,” she said. “ The ‘ double wiggle-waggle begins like the double flip-flap.” She illustrated with her fingers. “ Then you do the crab-step. And then you go like this.” Here her fingers began to race.

“ And you have those long shoes, like racing skates? ”

“ Yes. Curled up at the ends. And your skirt keeps catching in the ends.”

“ I wish,” said Lionel, “ that you would teach me. I’ll tell you what you can’t do, Miss Plunket. You can’t do the Ghost Dance. I saw a man do it in Africa. Horrid. I’ll teach you the Ghost Dance if you’ll teach me the double wiggle-waggle.”

“ All right. Come in some morning. Or come to the Tuesday Club. Come to the Tuesday Club tomorrow. Dora will be with me. You know Dora.”

“ Thanks. We’ll do the wiggle-waggle to music. Have you got castanets? ”

“ Oh, yes. Don’t you love castanets? Oh, they go right through. They give you all sorts of weird things. I like doing cachuca, or cueca. Oh, don’t talk about castanets, or I shall begin to dance here. You can put your head right back, and smile, and then the delicious little run forward. And, oh, the snapping when you sway.”

“ Yes, castanets are glorious. But have you ever seen bajados? Or heard them, I mean? ”

“ No. What are bajados? ”

“ They’re a kind of a Spanish bell-clapper. A friend of mine got some from Costa Rica. They’re castanets, as it were, with a bell-motif. You hold them in your

hand, just like castanets, and you dance to bells, instead of to bones. They're not quite so primitive as the bones."

"I like primitive things," she said. "Did you ever dance to a tom-tom? A friend of mine got one once and played it while I danced."

"What did you dance? A breakdown?"

"No. I had my dance time in my head. But all the time the tom-tom was going, I seemed to be out of my body, dancing to that. It was the most delicious feeling. I felt all sorts of primitive things."

"Miss Plunket," said Lionel. "We mustn't be primitive any longer. Lady Hamlin's beginning muster."

"Well," she said, beginning to rustle, "to-morrow. The Tuesday Club, Gainsborough Studios, off Tite Street, at eleven?"

"Thanks," he said, standing up. The ladies were off. Miss Plunket turned, as she went, and softly called to him.

"Bring your Bajadozes," she said. He noticed that her hair was very pretty, done in that fluffy way.

"I will," he said, smiling. "If I can find my friend," he added. She was too far away to hear the last. The sporting lady, catching up Miss Plunket, passed out with her. Both girls were laughing. He saw the beautiful woman pass out. She had a pale, dreamy face, he thought. Her dress was a severe black silk, with some old jewels at the breast. She walked slowly. At the door, little Polly Hamlin, Sir Patrick's youngest girl, just out, raced up to her and caught her hand. The woman's face lit up. She stroked the girl's hand, and laughed. They went out of the room side by side.

The door closed. The men drew up their chairs. Old Sir Patrick, gathering a group about him, explained the qualities of his cigars, exposed in many

boxes. He praised a light cigar from Borneo, and a long light cheroot, pierced with a straw, from Ceylon. For the moment no one spoke to Lionel. The men were choosing their cigars, or offering each other matches. Lionel helped himself to a cigar, and lit it, still thinking of the woman's look, when her face lit up. "Women aren't a sex. They're a free-masonry," he said to himself. He envied Polly Hamlin that look. He envied the woman that was so beloved of Polly. "Women get all the love in this world," he said to himself. Even if he lived to be forty-seven, no boy of eighteen would race up to greet him with quite such evident affection. To be loved by a woman. That was glory enough for one life. They were so far above men. They were so sacred. So beautiful. He was in love with his work, of course; but work was not everything. Wanting love, he wanted inspiration. What would it be to have a woman like that in his life? A woman like that beautiful pale thing with the great brow. To have those eyes looking into his, with love, and trust, and sympathy. To know what went on in the brain there. To have that life merged into his. To be the body to that soul.

He was in a dangerous, sentimental mood about women. He was just back from the wilds. It was nine months since he had spoken to an English lady. Only eight weeks before, he had been grilling in an African pest-house, where the only women were a maniacal case of sleeping sickness and a hag with itch. Now he was back among all these wonderful, beautiful women to whom a man could kneel and pray, they were so exquisite. All through dinner he had been watching them. Their dresses, and scents, and jewels, their arms, their hair. They had been a wonder and an intoxication. And yet, he thought, as the tobacco dulled his excitement, there was only one woman among

them. That woman in the black silk was the only one who could bring a man upon his road. The others were bright, delightful companions, or playmates, or playthings. Some of them, and these the most attractive, were less even than these. They were of the nature of those fish, which float with the sea's current, till a ship or a shark drive by, to which they can affix themselves by suction. Once affixed, they never let go, though the shark scrape his hide to strips on the rocks, or the shipmen worry with patent scrubbers. They are drags upon ship and shark, so that either moves wearily, when once the suckers have taken hold. The suckers even insult in some cases that the clogged do not move fast enough for their pleasure.

"Hullo, Heseltine," said Maunsel, the naval lieutenant, as he settled himself into the chair next to Lionel. "Are you just back from somewhere? By Jove, you're burnt. Been in India?"

"No," said Lionel. "Africa. Doing sleeping sickness. What are you doing? You look a bit peaked. Are you staying here?"

"Yes. I crocked my leg, jumping a ditch. I'm staying up till the New Year, getting massaged. Won't you have some port?"

"No, thanks. Your uncle's looking well."

"Yes. Isn't he splendid? By Jove, I think he's marvellous. Are you up for long?"

"Yes, I hope so. If I can stand the cold. It makes one a bit liverish after Africa. No. No coffee, thanks. What's going on here? Who's married? I hear Polly's out."

"Yes. What else is there: Eric's engaged to Milly Plunket, Dora's sister. You know Milly. You were sitting next to her. As to what's going on, there's a debate or something about limiting the powers of party government. Are you a Socialist?"

"I? I'm nothing. I shift to whichever party has constructive ideas. Are you mixed up in politics?"

"No. Lord save us, no. By the way, did you ever finish that new war game? You told me about it once at your rooms. And then your Tactical Handbook, with all those topographical parallels. That was a fine idea, finding English parallels for famous battlefields. Did you never finish them?"

"No. I never finished them. They were only amusements. What are you doing, besides getting massaged?"

"I've come in for a property from Uncle Michael. I've had a lot of work over the succession. You must come down for a shoot. I'd like to see something of you."

"Thanks. I should like that. Evelyn's looking well."

"My sister? Have you seen her?"

"Weren't you talking to her just before we came down?"

"That? No. Evelyn's in Auxerre. That was Miss Derrick."

"Really? I saw a dark girl, with a lot of colour. I made sure it was your sister. Who is Miss Derrick?"

"She's a friend of Dora's," said Maunsel, flushing a little. Lionel noticed the flush, and attributed it to love. "She was at school with Dora. She's here a good deal."

"Rather nice, that blue-green kimono thing she wore."

"Yes," said Maunsel, shortly.

"By the way," said Lionel. "Who was the woman sitting next to you? I seemed to know her face."

"The one in black, with the rubies? That's Mary Drummond. You must have met her here. She's a sort of second cousin. She's a delightful woman. I must introduce you. I thought you knew her."

Have you known us all these years, and never met Mary?"

"No. But then I've never been home for long. I must have heard of her. Is she married?"

"Yes. But she doesn't live with her husband."

"I said to myself that her marriage would be a tragedy. Who is he?"

"Drummond? He used to be a novelist. Do you remember a book called *The Passional*? That was by him. He began like a man of talent. But he was always rather a neurotic specimen. He had a nervous breakdown, and after that he took to drink."

"Couldn't she keep him straight? What was she doing, to let him get that way?"

"She couldn't control him. Why should she? He wasn't on her plane. Besides, Drummond's queer in other ways. He was a ghastly blackguard to her. Beast! He's . . ." Maunsel dropped his eyes, and muttered something, looking down.

"It may have been congenital," said Lionel.

"Then why did he marry? Married to get a house-keeper. Of course, she has her own life. She's interested in reforms, and she's fond of music. She won't divorce him, for of course that would . . . You see? No woman could. Look here. Have some Benedictine, won't you?"

"No thanks. How does Drummond live? Does he write?"

"There's a publisher called Leonard Scroyle, who runs the paper called *The Backwash*. Scroyle keeps Drummond in a garret over the office. It's somewhere in Covent Garden. He gives him just enough indulgence to keep him quiet, and not enough to stop his writing. He writes rather well when he's half drunk; and Scroyle's too clever to risk a scandal. A scandal would stop that source of revenue. His one fear is that

Mary will bring divorce proceedings. It's an awful shame that a woman like that can't get a divorce without being dragged in the dirt. She would be, of course, if she tried."

"The rotten kind of press would get on to it," said Lionel. "What right have journalists to make these people's futures impossible. Linen as dirty as Drummond ought not to be washed in public. It ought to be sterilised in an oven."

Old Sir Patrick hobbled over to them.

"Well, Lionel," he said, "how's Africa? Glad to be back? I've just been reading you in the *Journal*. I see you had a good time. What are you going to do now?"

"Do you remember Naldrett, sir? He was in Africa with me. I brought him here a year ago. He and I were thinking of starting and endowing a laboratory for different kinds of research. And we are planning a little scientific paper to be our organ."

"It sounds very . . . eh? What kind of research will you be doing? You personally?"

"No particular research, sir. I want to get people interested in science. I mean, interested enough to give science a hand in the conduct of life."

"Oh, Lord," said Sir Patrick. "We're too much governed altogether as it is. How many more forms do you want us to fill up? Oh, no, my boy. Life isn't to be conducted. Life's a bone for the top dog. Besides, do you suppose we doctors'll let you take the bread out of our mouths? Leave the conduct of life. Conduct of life! I'm surprised at you." He revolved the taste of his port, shaking his head. "I don't like it," he said, "when a young man talks of the conduct of life. I never did, when I was a young man. And I don't suppose, if you had it, you'd stop a single infectious case."

"No, sir," said Lionel. "That would not be my aim. My aim would be to give political power to men who know how science can improve life."

"That is politics, then? Not science? Or revolution. Eh? Revolution? We shall have you on Tower Hill. Well, well, well. Doctors are a lot too powerful as it is. All this improving the world and perfecting life is bunkum. Young men are too clever. When I was a young man I used to ride steeplechases. I say, Billy, come over here and talk to Lionel here. He's fretting." He smiled at Lionel friendly, and passed on to another guest, hobbling but merry, leaving Lionel sad that an intellect so fine should lack interest in a new thing. "He's getting old," Lionel thought, with the mercilessness of youth. "He's not standing for intellect, now; but for the machine by which it works. Death ought to take intellect before that." He talked with one or two men about the chances of war. The intellectual game of war had exercised his wits for years. He was deep in a battle, when the old man, seeing that wine and narcotics were beginning to pall upon his guests, proposed that they should go upstairs.

They went up.

When Lionel entered the drawing-room, Milly Plunket was at the piano, softly patting the keys with the tips of her pretty fingers. She was not playing. She was looking up at her lover, Eric Hamlin, who was presently to turn her music for her. Her attitude betokened both surrender and domination. It said, very plainly, that that handsome young male was hers, by right of capture; and that, at the same time, she was a beauty very well worth a man's desire. Lionel had not congratulated Eric. He walked up to him, and wished him joy. He said something polite to Milly, who smiled very sweetly, showing beautiful teeth. She rose suddenly; and delicately admonished Eric.

"Eric, your tie is too disgraceful. Let me." A deft pat and touch corrected the tie. Lionel was almost touching her. Her vague, indefinite scent, half iris, half sandalwood, stirred him strangely. Those white soft arms, serpentine in their languor and grace, were serpentine in their allurements. He had only to stoop to kiss them. He looked at Milly with a little hot pang. He wished that a woman as beautiful were stretching out her arms to him, and that those vague scents, so sweet, and so disturbing, were parts in a forgetting of the world for him.

A minute later she was singing an old French song, with the sort of voice common to successful women. Though Lionel was fond of music he was not deeply sensitive to the singing voice, her songs moved him less than the rhythm of her hands, so delicately shaped and whitened. He felt a longing to seize and kiss the hands. Looking round the room at the assembled women, a sense of their beauty, a sense of the beauty of their unlikeness to him, took hold of him. He longed to be everything to some one woman there, or that he might be something to all the women there. Even the plainest girl there was something sacred and desirable. He was out of this world. Coming into it suddenly, after all the months abroad, showed him the gulf between them. He felt the contrast. In a moment of tenderness, which was half self-pity, he wished to have the entry of that other world, and to know these women, as they knew each other. A refined, tender, heroic, beautiful world, made up of sacredness and unselfishness, merry, too, and very sweet. So he thought of it, while the music lasted. So had he thought of it, time after time, on coming back from the wilds. Looking at them from where he stood, under a great standard lamp, he felt it bitter that he was not like the other young men there. He was only on sufferance, for a

little time. Soon he would be going back to the wilds, to measure death in a test-tube. And even if he came back again, that would be his life still, that would be his real life, to which he would soon have to return, a life of camp, and thirst, and recurrent fever.

Something in the lighting of the room, in the softness of the music, and in the feeling of being at home again after hardships endured, gave a romantic beauty to all these women. He felt that something was about to happen. Some fantastic revelation was in the air, moving all that life to its expression. He would always remember this moment and these women. He would fix them in his mind forever, the fair girl with the blue eyes, talking to Maunsel, and beautiful Mrs. Drummond talking to Sir Patrick, and the little dark woman, whose hair rose up polished and in grain, like a polished metal firescreen. Looking from one fair face to another, in the subdued lamplight, he felt that all were beautiful inexpressibly, and sacred. He was touched by the impossibility of thinking evil of any woman there. He felt the impossibility of thinking in their presence. He longed to do. He wished that the great lamp beside him might explode, so that he might stifle the flames for them.

As the song ended, a woman walked across the room towards the piano. She was the woman whom he had mistaken for Maunsel's sister. He noticed her now. She was a dark, beautifully-made woman, dressed in a black kimono, brodered with blue and green dragons. The wide, falling sleeves showed her arms above the elbow whenever she raised them. They were very beautiful arms. The hands were plump and well-cared for, but a little ineffectual. So much he noted vaguely before her face came into the light of the lamp. After giving Eric a smile of recognition she bent to ask Milly for some favourite song. Lionel saw then that the woman was a beauty, in a brilliant, unsubtle way. She

had bright colour. Her cheeks were flushed with colour; her great dark eyes were vivid with life and light. Her hair, which was of the darkest shade of brown, caught the light everywhere. In the depths of it, above the ears, which, being rather harshly modelled, she had hidden, she had thrust a red rose. There was not much play upon the face, but there was vividness. The beauty was of an obvious kind, and yet, when, at Milly's question, "Have you met Mr. Heseltine, Rhoda?" she looked at Lionel, the eyes took on a sort of mystery. It was not that she was enigmatic. She was merely puzzled by the unusual in Lionel's face. Lionel bowed, being introduced. When she spoke to him, he thought that her voice was a little strained. There was a note of excitement in the voice as in the colour.

"I've heard so much about you," she said, "from Sir Patrick and Dora. You were in India, weren't you?"

"Africa," he said.

"But you were in India?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"Didn't you meet some persons called Carnlow in Bombay?"

"Carnlow? Yes. Rather. A dark man? A soldier?"

"Yes. A brown man, with a very long moustache. He's my brother-in-law. Very tall man. Very long moustache. His men call him Crucifix."

"I don't remember his wife much. Did I meet her? I ought to remember. Your sister can't be like you at all."

"She's much taller. She's very clever and very good-looking. You ought to remember her. I know you met her. She danced with you. She sent us an illustrated paper about the plague, with your portrait in it. She wrote, 'I danced with this man,' under the portrait.

I recognised you directly I saw you. And she mentioned you in some of her letters. She was always writing about the epidemic. You were very keen on destroying flies of all sorts?"

"We all were," said Lionel. "I wish I could remember your sister. Is she still out there?"

"Yes. She's still out there."

"We got shifted about so during the plague," he said. "And we weren't like persons. We were just a little, drilled force fighting. The fighting was everything, the fighters nothing. Afterwards it was funny to find ourselves persons again."

"That's very interesting," she said. "But isn't that what happens in every form of struggle?"

"The issues aren't often so big," he said, musing. "We were in a queer mood. Did your sister ever tell you how she felt?"

"More or less," Miss Derrick answered. "I noticed one thing. She didn't seem to feel the horror. I felt the horror. She told me some most awful stories as though they were everyday events, like going to pay a call."

"Oh, that's the East," he said. "One gets snuffed out very easily in the East. Life and death come to be just the different sides of the picture. The real problem in the East is to justify your philosophy."

"That sounds very oriental—philosophy," she said, not quite knowing what to make of him.

"It is strange in the West," he said. "Here there is no life. There is only a passion for pretty things. How to get them, or how to behave when you've got them. I think you know Colin Maunsel? Where is this estate that he's come in for?"

Miss Derrick's face changed a little, inscrutably. "It's in Wiltshire," she said. "So you know him? I was chaffing him about it, just before dinner. I was

telling him, he'd be able to settle down now to his disgusting rum and chewing tobacco."

"He never liked to be treated as a sailor," said Lionel. Miss Derrick did not answer. She left a little silence, and changed the conversation. Lionel received the impression that he was snubbed for having discovered something that she had discovered for herself. Miss Derrick asked him if he would be long in London. He said that he thought it likely, as though the prospect were unpleasant. "London gives a kind of excitement," he said, as though apologising for a bad habit. "It's like dram-drinking."

She had known it only as a town of amusement, full of shops. She looked at him with perplexed eyes. "You were in Africa, you say," she said. "Did you see any lions?"

"Yes. Lots."

"Man-eaters?"

"Yes."

"Weren't you awfully frightened?"

"Yes. Awfully." They laughed. Presently Miss Derrick began again.

"Were you in a very lonely part?"

"Yes. Very lonely. It's very strange to be in a room like this so soon afterwards. It's like coming to another world. Were you ever in the tropics, Miss Derrick?"

"No, never. I've often longed to go. They must be very beautiful."

"I never like to think of Englishwomen in the tropics," said Lionel. "Women have a hard enough time without going to the tropics. What makes you want to go?"

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose one wants to see life as it is, without all this pretence."

"Well, but isn't that a wrong wish, Miss Derrick,"

said Lionel. "It's the pretence which makes life so fine. Life without art is just savagery; and savagery is hideous; like any other natural condition."

Miss Derrick looked at Lionel with interest. She leaned a fraction of an inch towards him.

"But how am I to know that?" she said. "A woman hears that theory from the time she is two. As a rule the theory is enough. She is quite content. But suppose something makes the art hideous, like any other unnatural condition?"

Old Sir Patrick came up.

"Rhoda," he said, "I want this young man. I want to introduce him to Mrs. Drummond, over here." Heseltine took his leave; Miss Derrick graciously released him. In another moment, he was walking across to Mrs. Drummond, trying to brace himself to shine. He had often wondered whether women ever forgave men for being dull; and whether they could tell when their beauty had upset a man, and whether they made all allowances for the results of such upsettings. He supposed not. Some women expected that their beauty would inspire men for the occasion. For the thousandth time he was conscious that the excessive redness of his eyes, due to the use of trypanroth a year or two before, gave him an odd look. He wished that he were better looking. What would a woman like that know of trypanroth? She would put it down to drink and evil living.

The introduction was made. A bull-voiced young Hamlin at the piano prepared to bellow, thumping a command-note like something bursting. "O God," said Lionel, in dismay, recognising the preliminary, "it's 'Ahasuerus.'"

"What is?" said Mrs. Drummond, smiling.

"I. I beg your pardon," said Lionel, flushing. "It's 'Ahasuerus.' The thing he's going to sing."

"Is it?" she said. "Well, let's run away while there's time. Let's go into this little side-room."

"It's rather dark. Won't you mind?" said Lionel.

"No. Come along. Hsh! He's beginning." They tiptoed into the little room. Ahasuerus without began to grant "another day of slaughter against the Jews." Lionel collided with a little table. A flower vase fell upon its side. He grabbed it quickly. There followed the cheerless dribble-drip of water falling on carpet.

"Did it break?" said Mrs. Drummond.

"No, thanks," he said. "The water didn't go on your skirt, I hope?"

"No. It wouldn't matter if it did."

"How is it that women never run into tables?" said Lionel. "You wouldn't have done that, would you? Where will you sit? Will you sit here?"

"Thanks. I'll sit here," said Mrs. Drummond. "You sit there, and talk to me. I've been looking forward to meeting you. Sir Patrick so often speaks of you. And I knew your mother, years ago. She was very good to me. You were a little tiny boy, then."

"That was in Ireland, then, at Coisnacraga?"

"Yes." Her voice made him feel that the Irish memory was painful. She put it from her at once. "You've just come back from Africa, where you've been curing sleeping-sickness?"

"We didn't cure very much, Mrs. Drummond," Lionel said. "Our cure wasn't certain by any means. The real cure was discovered while we were out there. I'm glad they've got a cure. It's a horrid thing to watch."

"Yes. It must be. Dreadful. They rave a great deal, don't they? It is so awful to hear a person who is not a person. Won't you tell me what you are going to do, now? Sir Patrick tells me you're going to start a paper. I would like so much to talk to you about

that. Would you mind? Or would you rather not? Be quite frank, won't you?"

"I would love to talk about it. I never knew a man yet who didn't like to talk about himself. But I'm afraid it would bore you."

"I love all things which interest others," said Mrs. Drummond, "I would love to hear. Sir Patrick said that you were going to call for a scientific supervision of the national life. Is that your scheme?"

"Yes. That was what we planned."

"That is very interesting. Does that mean some scheme of Eugenics?"

"I would like to do that. But Naldrett (he's the man who is doing it with me)—Naldrett is a sentimentalist. He baulks. I believe in Eugenics. I would make it a penal offence to marry without the written consent of a brain specialist and a gymnast. Wouldn't you, Mrs. Drummond?"

"No," she answered, smiling, as he could see even in the half-darkness of the room. "Marriage is so much more than that. Marriage is just as much a refuge as an escape. People marry because they love each other and want to help one another to be the finest thing possible. Often they marry because they want a permanent object for their affections. A system of Eugenics would stunt so many lives by denying them the possibilities of tenderness that in the long run the State would lose quite as much as it gained. States thrive by enthusiasm and nervous quickness, by just those kinds of fine madness which your gymnast and brain specialist would unite to suppress."

"I don't agree, Mrs. Drummond. States thrive while they preserve a strong and stern efficiency for life, while they look things in the eye, straight, without any cant about what might be. When they do this best, they become so well that they begin to boil over. That

is your enthusiasm and nervous quickness. It comes from the body's being prosperous in other ways. I believe that if we looked at things straight, and killed off our rogues and inefficients, instead of keeping them healthy so that they may have every opportunity for breeding, we should soon begin to show that enthusiasm. And healthily, instead of feverishly, as at present."

"But at what a cost," said Mrs. Drummond.

"That's exactly what you all say. 'At what a cost.' National efficiency and nervous quickness are cheap at any cost. All you've got to do is to give up what is least use and most trouble to you, and yet you cry out at once 'At what a cost.' If some one would gag Ahasuerus there, and shove him under the piano till we had done talking, would you pretend to be grieved for Ahasuerus? No. You'd be jolly glad, and you'd feel that he deserved it."

Mrs. Drummond smiled at the vehemence of the young bull among the crockery.

"If I were glad," she said, "I should know that I had failed in life. We'll go into this question by and by, when Ahasuerus stops for applause. Will you tell me what it is that you intend to propose? I am interested in a scheme more or less of the same kind as yours."

"Will you tell me your scheme first?"

"No. Yours first."

"You will afterwards?"

"Yes. Now yours."

"Well, Mrs. Drummond, I think this. In early times, the fighting man was the most necessary kind of man. He took the power, and made it hot for the people who wouldn't or couldn't fight. Then there came the spiritual man, who took the power and made it hot for all who wouldn't or couldn't believe. Now

there comes the scientific man who wants to get the power to make it hot for those who won't or can't conform to the plain dictates of science. I suppose at the present day there isn't a nation under the sun which lives less wisely than ourselves. I mean with less regard for the ways of life proved to be sane. I want to teach people that life's all right, or would be, if it were made less of a losing battle. As it is, it is a losing battle, only more useless and more tragical. The wisest and best in the nation are at the mercy of every dirty man and selfish man and stupid man. I want to establish a scientific authority strong enough to insist that what science has discovered to perfect life shall be applied to life. Man ought to live in cleanliness and comfort for the public good, if not for his own. Those who make this not possible have no right to live in a scientific age. I know you'll say that I am threatening personal liberties. I don't see that there is any liberty under a competitive industrialism. Science is the only idea that offers a new law and a new priesthood. Growing man is always striving for those."

"Yes," said Mrs. Drummond. "So far I agree. But I feel that you aren't quite just to this present age. I don't think there has ever been such an age since the beginning of the world. The world is just one big passion for the reform of abuses. I daresay the English have uncomfortable ways. All nations have. But when one comes to look at them closely one sees that they're generally based on a kind of idealism, which is quite fine, however misguided the workings of it may be. How are you going to get rid of your dirty men and all the rest of it? By agitation? By changing public opinion?"

"There are many ways of changing the world," he said. "And they all seem so innocent till it's too late to stop them. I agreed to start this scheme of ours,

thinking that it would be an amusement for a few friends. Now that I look at it closely, I see that it is a tremendous revolutionary idea. I see possibilities in it that I did not see. Political possibilities. Seeing them, I would like to try to realise them. And at once the whole thing changes."

"I know," she said. "When Nature wants a thing done she creates an illusion about it."

"She does," he said. "And the world progresses because of its illusions."

"You won't realise your vision," she said.

"No. No one worth anything does that. 'Success is the brand on the brow for aiming low.' And then when man attempts a revolution he often finds that Nature only wants the attempt. It's one of her ways of killing off the imperfect."

"You are very reasonable, for a prophet," she said. He laughed.

"Life likes a slow growth," he said. "Nature's not generous. She has a way of stabbing in the back when you think you've caught her. I dread a 'conquest of Nature.' It is so often like war. Did you ever hear the phrase 'he who makes a turning movement is himself turned?' Will you tell me of your reform?"

"My reform," she said, "is rather like yours in a way. I am in a movement for strengthening Public Health authorities. I see that that isn't radical enough for you. When Sir Patrick spoke, I was hoping that we might be able to work together, at least in some ways. I find it so difficult to get men with medical knowledge to help in the movement. But I would like to talk to you about our schemes. I would like, too, to hear of Africa. Are you ever free, I wonder? Perhaps you would come to lunch with me one day this week? Would you?"

"I should be delighted," Lionel said.

"And bring your friends. Perhaps they would come, too?"

"They're over in Ireland still," he answered. "Or I'm sure they would be delighted."

"Well, perhaps you will bring them some other time. I live in Maundy Mansions. Will you lend me a pencil? I'll write you directions how to get there."

He unhooked a little pencil case from his watch chain. Bending forward towards the light she wrote on a card. Looking at her, as she wrote, he felt again that sudden impulse which had moved him a little while before, near Milly Plunket. He longed to take her hands in his. He longed to have her great eyes looking into his, and to have that superb hair loose about him. These women made him conscious of the want in his life.

Possibly Mrs. Drummond was conscious of the tumult beginning in the young man. She complained that she could not see what she was writing. She asked him to turn on the light. She finished the directions.

"That is everything," she said, giving him the card. "So we shall have a talk on Friday." He noticed an old French ring on her left hand. Old Sir Patrick entered.

"I'm going to take this young man away," he said. "Miss Plunket wants to know about a dance or something, and he must come at once, for she's got to go."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Drummond. He offered his hand. She took it. Her smile was very winning. He must have looked at her rather hard for she dropped her eyes. Afterwards he was afraid that he had stared. He had been struck by the sight of her head in full relief against the dark green of the curtains. He had wanted to fix it in his mind.

Miss Dora Plunket sat in the hall, talking to Miss Derrick. Lionel advanced upon her.

"Oh, Mr. Heseltine," she said. "We want you to

come to the Club at twelve to-morrow, instead of eleven. Milly finds she's promised Rhoda to go to Harrod's."

"Certainly. At twelve," he said. The ladies rose. Miss Derrick stooped for her cloak.

"Let me do that," said Lionel. He laid the cloak on her shoulders. One of her hands, a rather hot and feverish hand, just touched his as she took the clasp. She smiled as she thanked him. Old Sir Patrick and Eric saw them to their carriage.

Lionel thought that it was time for him to go. He took his leave of the Hamlins and found his coat. Billy Hamlin, a Fusilier, waited on him to the door.

"What are you doing in town, Billy?" Lionel asked, as he put on his coat. "Why aren't you killing things?"

"I've been with Newtown-Stewart at Hampage for the last week," said the soldier. "There's been an election. I've come up for a rest. Political work takes it out of you."

"You weren't canvassing?"

"No. I was moterin' the voters to the poll, and organisin' processions. Do you know a Miss Maclaine? Comes from Ireland. An awfully pretty girl?"

"Yes. Was she there?"

"Yes. I don't think I'd have stuck it if she'd not been there. I had a feeling you knew her. Isn't she an awfully good sort?"

"Yes. How did the election go?"

"Oh, our man won, young Cleland. You may have met him. A majority of two thousand. You see, they've got no motors, the Radicals. We got a lot of people by giving them rides in motors. And then we had processions. That's what people really like, you know. They don't understand all this about Tariffs. But they do like a procession and a ride in a motor-car."

"Yes," said Lionel. "A good circus is half the battle." He left the soldier on the doorstep, for the

cold of the November night made him shudder. He walked briskly across Oxford Street, down Bond Street, and through Brook Street to Hanover Square. He was glad to feel pavement under him. A cold blast made him hug himself under his wraps. It was good to be back again in spite of the cold. His mind was full of the exaltation of being back again. The glare of Regent Street, the lights, the faces, the coloured lamps, were welcome to him. He thought of his evening at the Hamlins with a tenderness that was half exaltation. Mrs. Drummond's beauty, Miss Derrick's vividness, and Miss Plunket's grace arose in his mind one after the other, winning, brilliant and suave. In his dangerous, sentimental mood he paid a tribute of worship to all three, wondering if there would ever be a woman in his life, some one to love, one to change life for him. He wanted that caress given so idly by Miss Plunket to her lover. He wanted a touch that would set him on fire.

Women passed him. There were many women. Some of them spoke to him. One of them was a child of eighteen, hard-eyed already. Many women passed him, a multitude of women, a monstrous regiment. Stopping on the broad sidewalk in Leicester Square he counted fifty-seven in five minutes. The result of making women sheep," he said. "One of the things that men say 'must always be here.' What a mass of evil waits for an act of will."

As he wandered on, the vastness of London, its incredible grossness of life, began to stimulate him. Here was all this vast disease spread out for a surgical Balzac. Here was all this great floppy cancer ready for his probe, his lance, his surgical saw. There was something grand about it. Looking out from his upper window in Pump Court, he smoked some strong French cigarettes, thinking of it all. He was glad to be back. Something of Billy Hamlin's talk remained with him. "Yes," he

said to himself. "Billy's right. To get a thing done one must drop all this cant of principle." He foresaw a speedy breaking of the triumvirate.

Before raking out the fire, he looked round the room with a bachelor's desolating sense of loneliness. "Good Lord," he thought. "This isn't a life." He looked at the empty wicker chair at the other side of the fireplace. What would life be like, he wondered, if brilliant Rhoda Derrick were sitting there, in her kimono, with a rose in her hair. He imagined her sitting there, looking at him, summing him up. He imagined her putting her hands behind her head. The broad sleeves of the kimono fell back, showing her arms. She was a beautiful creature. Beauty and tenderness and grace were the things wanting to him. Wanting these, he wanted everything. He was lonely here. His life was empty. He wanted "an asylum for his affections." The coals dropped. Their crimson dulled to grey. He began to feel chilly. He began to remember stories of men who lived alone in chambers till they had gone mad. Lots of them had gone mad; mad, not as hatters, but as wig-makers, in all sorts of obsolete ways of madness. Old legal faces grinned at him. They had gone mad (perhaps in that very room), from port and law and loneliness. They had hanged themselves perhaps from those very doors. That was the one jest of their lives, to hang themselves from doors, so that their clerks might be shocked in the morning. Snuffy old men, with parchment faces, had chuckled there, standing on chairs, fixing the rope. A bachelor could choose between that and the street. Well. He had made his choice, years before. Feeling that he was in for a bout of fever, he took a large dose of quinine and went to bed.

CHAPTER II

THE rooms of the Tuesday Club were at the top of Gainsborough Mansions, a vast red Chelsea barrack of expensive flats. They had once been tenanted by Thomas de Vries, the artist, whose pamphlet, "Official Art, an Exposure," had made the Academy the subject of a question in the House. When De Vries died, a few years before the opening of this story, his clique, too old, now, mostly, to abandon settled habits, decided to continue his famous Tuesday evenings. A Mrs. Burgess, a rich lady among them, who had bought several of his pictures, took the flat for a long term. She was a graceful, tactful woman with theories of art. Luckily for herself they had won her the friendship of a practitioner. De Vries had had a deep regard for her. For a year or two he had even been swayed by her, nor had she realised that it was her beauty and grave delightful charm, not her theories, which influenced him. Since his death, the clique had been much enlarged. It was now a Club of people, mostly young, rather rich, rather idle people, interested in Art, or, as sometimes happened, merely amused by it for the moment.

The great studio, almost big enough for a tennis court, was now the reception room. The walls were hung with picked De Vries' drawings, most of them studies in red chalk, from the figure. At one end of the room were the three jewels of the Burgess collection, De Vries' masterpiece, the "Octavia" (Mrs. Burgess on a green sofa), the "Twilight" (an interior, Mrs. Burgess in blue-grey), and the "Crepuscle," a music room, taper-light, Mrs. Burgess in grey-blue. Fronting these, at the room's other end, was a gallery, which was used

on Club nights by the singers and musicians. At other times it was a dim, silent bower, discreet with tapestry, where one could talk, in low voice, on the influence of art on the soul, and other matters. In a smaller room, opening from the studio, the contributions of the Club members were preserved. Every member of the Club had to contribute a work of art to this collection before he or she could be admitted to Club rights. Here they were displayed. The walls were hung with sketches and drawings, rough pencilled notes, elaborate studies, designs for pictures, for tapestry, for stained glass. On shelves and pediments were clay and wax models, little bronzes, little plaster casts tinted to resemble bronzes. In a cabinet were a few jewels and a little embroidery. On a bookshelf were various small books of verse, prose colour-effects, eccentric criticism. There were also some bound collections of the same, interspersed with the scores of music, and reproductions from modern etchings. The backs of these collections were labelled "The Scrap Book of the Tuesday Club." The fly leaves bore the legend "Imprinted at the Sign of the Master, 1003, The Dene, Chiselhurst."

In this room, among the pretentious litter produced by the incompetent and the idle, Lionel waited for Miss Plunket and her friend. While he waited, he turned over the papers on the table. He had already seen the daily and weekly papers. Besides these there was nothing worth perusal save some half dozen monthly Art magazines, full of elaborate reproductions. One of these contained an article on the portraits in the Museo Berraco at Naples. He read this article with interest. He noted the points of the heads, wondering if any man had compared them with existing local types. He wished that he had the busts beside him, to turn about and measure. Reproductions gave one no sense of what the head meant. They were deceitful; they could be

made to deceive. He liked to have a bust so pivoted that he might turn it to all angles, catching stray, unsuspected strength or weakness, in the flex of the mouth, the nose's poise, and the chin's contradiction. He wondered what the Cæsar head would reveal if one could come to it with a knowledge of skulls, and an entire ignorance of the sycophancy of historians.

Coming to the end of the heads he sat up in his chair, much annoyed at the delay of the ladies. Busy people like himself were sometimes forced to be unpunctual; but the first duty of flowers was to be in position for the bee. He picked up another Art paper. This one was more amusing than the other. It had an article on some Roman finds at Corduba. One of the finds was reproduced in illustration of the text. It was a surgeon's speculum, evidently not much worse than some recently in use among us. He made a note of the Archæological Society where the relic might be seen. He skimmed the pages to the end. At the end, there were half a dozen pages of correspondence about a well-known work of art. The bitterness of some of the correspondence interested him. It appeared that the picture had been sold to the nation for twice its value. The methods used to obtain the price were described at length, with comment. If the price had not been paid, "the picture would have been lost to the nation." That suggestion alone had raised the money. It struck Lionel suddenly that living in cities had produced in man an amazing capacity for hysteria. Suppose a really clever man were to direct that force for fine ends?

The door opened. Miss Dora Plunket rushed in with Rhoda.

"You poor man," she cried. "Have you been waiting long? You know we were kept. I am so awfully sorry. Milly can't come. How you must have blessed us. What is the time? Is it one?"

"A quarter to," said Lionel. "But I'm generally fast."

"Poor Mr. Heseltine hasn't even been allowed to smoke," said Rhoda.

"What wretches we are," said Miss Plunket. "He might have died. We are beasts, Rhoda. It was all your fault. Well, let us think, now. I've got to lunch early as I'm going to a matinée. Perhaps, Mr. Heseltine, you would lunch with us?"

"I am so sorry," said Lionel. "But I'm lunching with Billy Hamlin."

"Oh, don't let's trouble about lunch," said Rhoda. "The maids here know us. Let's borrow a spirit lamp and make coffee. You make such delightful coffee. And I'll go out and get some cakes."

"Couldn't I go?" Lionel asked.

"No. Certainly not. Besides, men buy such expensive cakes." Dora rang for the spirit lamp and coffee set. She remembered suddenly that Lionel would be in the way while she made the coffee. "Stupid of me," she said. "The Club's coffee's awful. Would you really mind, Mr. Heseltine, going to the Stores in Anson Street. It's just round the corner. And getting a quarter of a pound of the best fresh-ground coffee, while Rhoda gets the cakes?"

"My dear Dora," said Rhoda. "We can't ask Mr. Heseltine. It's a shame."

"Nonsense," said Lionel. "Come along, Miss Derrick." They went out together.

In the hall of the flat Lionel noticed Miss Derrick's dress. She wore a dark green coat and skirt. Beneath the coat she wore a silk blouse, of white finely striped with a very beautiful blue. Her hat was adorned with a motor veil of the same shade of blue. Over her shoulders she wore a stole of grey squirrel fur. Her gloves, of pale fawn, were tucked into an immense muff

of grey squirrel fur. She wore two small gold bracelets on her right wrist. She was faintly scented with a vague delicate perfume like the ghost of ambergris. Lionel's friend Naldrett had once defined the scent as "spirits of women."

"Are you used to these Bohemian ways, Mr. Heseltine?" she asked, shyly smiling at him.

"I'm not used to quite this kind of Bohemia," he answered truthfully, as he rang for the lift. "Do you use this Club much, Miss Derrick?"

"Yes," she said, stepping into the lift, "a good deal. She took advantage of the mirrors lining the cage to settle her veil. It was a fine veil dotted with a few spots of a darker blue than the substance. She made a little *moue* as she slipped the gauze over her chin. When it was in place she again glanced shyly at Lionel. One of the spots was settled at the angle of the mouth, with the effect of an eighteenth-century patch. The veil gave to her face that attractive fascination which veils give even to the hard-featured woman. They stepped into the hall. A commissionaire opened the door for them. On the doorstep Lionel spoke again. He had not walked thus with a pretty woman for more than a year. Something in Miss Derrick moved him. It was the beauty of her physical presence there, all that unlikeness to himself, dressed so vividly with so much dainty thought. He was moved by the idea of a delicate fastidiousness of mind trusting itself to something grosser and coarser. He had been touched, really, to the quick, by the movement of the neat, gloved hand daintily settling the veil at chin and throat. He had felt rebuked, and, as it were, ranked upon a low level, by that refinement of touch. He thought with a kind of awe of the state of intimacy in which a man might commune with these finer natures. He was genuinely impressed by something which would

not have moved one who had lived out of exile, within reach of normal companionship. Being impressed, he was anxious to let her see that her appearance was delightful to him.

"Miss Derrick," he said, "I have been trying to think what flower is just the colour of your veil? Is it the blue soapwort?"

"Saponaria is pink or purplish."

"Yes. But the tone, or softness, is the same. And it's the tone which makes the colour so wonderful. What is the flower? There is some flower."

"Yes. There is a flower. A wild flower. The 'Devil's bit' scabious. Do you know that flower? A little wild scabious, which grows on rough hills? I always associate it with the sea. I used to find it near the sea. Are you fond of colour?"

"Yes," said Lionel. "I'm fond of all colours. But a really subtle colour, a colour like your veil, gives one almost the effect of a discovery. It makes your hat like a great big flower. I should think people want to pick you. Where do we get our cakes?"

"I shall get the cakes, Mr. Heseltine. You are to get the coffee. Remember, fresh-ground. You'll find the tea and coffee department on the right, near the door of the Stores there. The place for cakes is just round the corner. Will you wait for me here? I won't keep you long."

"I will," he said. She smiled as she left him. He turned to his Stores. As he entered, she came to his side again. "Mr. Heseltine," she said, speaking shyly, "I've done such a stupid thing. I find I've left my purse upstairs."

"You must let me lend you some," he said. She blushed a little as she took it. It struck him that her character was a mixture of feminine timidities with the hardness of one conscious of them. He wondered, as

they ground the coffee for him, whether a woman's life were not really intolerable. To be so sensitive, to be always on guard, amid the unfeeling and the aggressive, to maintain a constant armed truce, with insufficient force; to be half a secret, and half a martyr. He was thankful that he had been born male. One cause of his thankfulness was, perhaps, the satisfaction of being on terms of mutual attraction with a being so beautiful and so dainty. His coffee cost him sevenpence.

Miss Derrick crossed the street to him, carrying a neat packet.

"Will you let me carry that?" he asked.

"No," she said, "I'll carry this, thank you. I suppose shopping is a great joy to you after being away so long?"

"No," he answered, simply. "One slips back into shopping quite unconsciously. But I don't think you can realise how strange it seems to be talking to a woman after nearly a year with men. And to see women every day. You look so awfully civilised, Miss Derrick. One never realises the difference till one gets back. You know, you frighten me. I think it's your veil. It makes me feel that I've been living like a wild beast."

She looked at him, a little touched by his directness. "You don't give one that impression," she said, smiling at him, this time with rather greater frankness. "But I know that living in exile like that must be wretched for men. I know my brother-in-law says that before he married it often almost drove him mad."

"Yes," said Lionel. "But the curse of exile is that you can't go mad. One has the work to attend to. One goes mad living alone in rooms in a city. Were you ever alone in a city, Miss Derrick?"

"I'm trying to think," she answered. "I've been alone in a country house with only servants."

"Did that get on your nerves?"

"Let me see. What did I do? I bathed in the sea and went for long walks with the dog. And at nights. Yes, at nights I used to get a little creepy. I used to read Maupassant's bogey stories in bed till I was afraid to blow out the candle." They stopped on the chilly landing outside the door of the flat.

"Are you an artist, Miss Derrick?" Lionel asked. "What did you do to get elected here?"

"I used to go in for jewellery and book-binding," she said. "I used to do enamel. Did you ever have time for things of that sort?"

"No," said Lionel, "I never had any leaning that way. Is any work of yours in the museum?"

"Yes," said Miss Derrick. "I'm sorry to say there is."

"Will you show it to me?"

"No. It really is not fit to show. Perhaps some day I'll show you some which I've done since then." A maid opened the door to them.

"Dora will be in the gallery," said Rhoda as she passed into a sitting-room. "Will you come up these little stairs here, Mr. Heseltine?" The room was hung about with a Holy Grail tapestry, from which the cross on a knight's shield glowed crimson. Miss Derrick paused at the corner of the room with her hand raised, holding back the cloth. Behind the embroidered knights and angels a little iron spiral stair showed. The poise of her head against the dimness of the background was very queenly. She put back her veil from her mouth. The brightness of her eyes and the pure vivid colour of her complexion, gave her for the moment an almost fairy beauty. "This is our romantic stair," she said. "Will you come up?"

Lionel hurried to hold the heavy cloth while she passed behind it. He followed her up the narrow stair into almost complete darkness. It struck him that it

was very still there. The swish of skirts, the noise of feet treading gently on metal alone sounded; beyond there was an absolute romantic silence. The swish of the dress ceased suddenly. He smelt the vague indefinite perfume, like the ghost of ambergris. A heavy velvet fabric touched his left hand. "Mr. Heseltine," said Miss Derrick's voice close beside him. There was laughter in her voice.

"Where are you?" he said, groping to the left. He touched her shoulder. "I beg your pardon," he added. "I didn't see you. Where have you got to?"

Pushing aside the hanging, he found Miss Derrick standing in a tiny turret chamber which opened off the stair. It was lit by two loopholes, into both of which old, blue painted glass had been heavily leaded. A very dim light came through these glasses. Lionel could see a bluish dimness of tapestry upon the walls. A dim, very distant noise of water slowly dropping, as though from a great height, made the silence almost unbearable. He could see Miss Derrick looming in a black mass against the wall. Her hat gave her the look of a cavalier listening in a priest's hole, while the roundheads sounded the panels.

"Do you know what this is, Mr. Heseltine?" she said. "This is De Vries' turret room. I daresay you know his picture 'The Blue Vigil.' He did a few lithographs as well, of very mysterious lovers looking at the moon. I'll show them to you after coffee. He got the landlord to build this place for him, so that he could work from it."

"How still it is here," said Lionel.

"Yes. It's copied from a silent tower in a French chateau. It is wonderfully silent. It makes one feel tense, as though something were going to happen. It was clever of him to think of the dropping water. Isn't it effective?"

"Yes. It sounds like a cave under the sea."

"He used to say that modern art is never content with itself. He said that each art was always striving to give the effect obtained by some other art. He said that poetry and music were trying to become painting, and that painting was trying to give so complete a statement of an emotional or intellectual crisis that it was trying to do more than paint can do, and so becoming impossible. In his own pictures he wanted to convey the feeling that his figures were intensely listening to a noise, or music, or a whisper. Perhaps art bores you, though. Does it?"

"Not at all," said Lionel. "It interests me. Especially modern art. I look on it as a morbid state, due to the turning inward of the healthy activities. It's an hallucination, Miss Derrick, caused by life in towns."

"We musn't keep Dora waiting," said Rhoda, leading the way out of the turret. Lionel followed her up the stairs to the music gallery, where Dora sat among cushions in the dimmest corner watching her kettle beneath a frame of the great lithographs, "The Hush," "The Coming," "The Blue Vigil," "The Moth-Hour." She did not pay much heed to those passionate faces, like souls, intensely listening. She stretched forth a practical hand for the coffee, and made the infusion neatly and precisely, with care that the cups should be hot before she filled them. Rhoda, putting up her veil above her hat brim, set forth an array of neat little cakes, lined with sugar, jam, chocolate, and almond paste. Then they ate and drank deliciously. As they ate, they talked nonsense which captivated Lionel more surely than the sweetest wisdom. Though he jested with them, he felt sorry for himself. He felt out of it. He did not belong to this delicate feminine world. He glanced at these women with wonder and awe. Rhoda

daintily dusting away a crumb upon her lap, and Dora delicately licking her finger tips, became for a moment, quite without their knowledge, images of all that was beautiful and sacred in womanhood.

He had meant to talk with Billy Hamlin about the methods of conducting elections; but did not do so. Instead, he asked Billy Hamlin judicious questions about Dora Plunket, from which he gathered, at last, that Rhoda was about twenty-four or five years old, that her mother was dead, that her father who was "rather a beast," had married again, and seldom saw his daughter, and that she was "a good-looking girl, with a good colour." Some men had been wild about her, but Billy was surprised at this since she was rather quiet, and stand-offish. Billy had heard that she was very clever at art and that sort of thing, which he supposed "one must be very clever to be able to do." Billy did not care for beautiful clever women who snubbed men less clever than themselves. "They may be very refined," he said, "but they're only refined, because some man has saved them from being anything else: and they only seem clever because they never have to test their cleverness in action." Lionel felt that the same might perhaps be said of Billy. He returned to his rooms feeling that woman could do no wrong. Instances of women's tact occurred to him. He thought of their quickness and fineness. "Life is a losing battle to them," he thought, "but they are heroic at it." Perhaps, had he looked at his thought closely, he would have seen that the women whom he had in mind were dark, with lovely colour, blue-grey eyes, and veils of pure blue.

Lying on his table was a telegram bearing the mark Ballymond. It was from the two friends with whom he was to start a paper.

"Keep Friday free," it ran. "Crossing Thursday

night. Want to arrange finally. Let us lunch Friday one o'clock your rooms. Naldrett. Fawcett."

He went into the Strand to wire to Naldrett that Friday at one would suit him very well. Afterwards he went to his bedroom to think out a plan of action. He drew the curtains and sat in the half darkness, staring at their heavy green folds for a full hour, trying to think all round his problem. He had borrowed this practice of thinking in isolation from Stonewall Jackson. His friend Naldrett had told him that the Irish bards had also used to meditate in silence and darkness. The bards had done more than Jackson. They lay down with millstones on their abdomens. Naldrett complained that he had never had much success with the Irish process. Thought had grown more complex, or something was wrong with the millstones, or abdomens weren't what they were.

It grew dark before he saw his way. It was a dangerous way, with lions in it; but then, in England, the lions are mostly sheep. Rousing from his thought, he took his coat and went out to dine at Simpson's. He lingered long over his meal so as to shorten the evening. Evenings in bachelor's rooms can be very long.

After dinner, Lionel returned to his rooms. He sat down to consider how to pass the evening. He did not care very much for plays, but he was fond of watching acting. He was tempted to go to a theatre. It was lonely work sitting reading in rooms in the Temple from half past eight till eleven. A theatre tided one over that bad time. And in a theatre if one chose one's play, a man could sympathise with a woman; he could feel tender to the heroine; and mentally vow himself her champion. And there was company in a theatre. Men and women in a crowd, under an emotional bond, which made them politer than usual. In his loneliest nights in London, years before, when he was without a friend,

he had gratified his yearning for speech with a woman by going to a theatre pit, and there, in the crowd, giving up his seat to a lady, who afterwards sucked peppermints. He wondered whether women ever suffered from the torment of the want of companionship with men. Perhaps not. Men are less desirable companions than women; and young women live less alone than men. They have also the resources of knitting and needlework, where men have only tobacco. He thought that he would go to a theatre. The old spiritual want of an asylum for his affections was beginning to eat into him again. He was beginning to imagine again the graceful, beautiful dark woman sitting opposite to him with a rose in her hair, laughing at life with him.

He suddenly remembered that he had invited these two men to lunch with him on Friday at a time when he was pledged to Mrs. Drummond. The recollection altered his plans. It gave him, he thought, a reasonable excuse to go to Mrs. Drummond to explain, and to ask her to join the party. He could do it by letter, he told himself, but he did not want to do it by letter. He wanted to talk to a woman. The thought of the possible impropriety of such a call occurred to him, but not strongly enough to stay him. He would go. He looked out a route in the map. If she were in, he would see her, and perhaps stay for a few minutes; if she were not in, he would leave a note.

He wrote a few lines. Then he quickly dressed, put some cigarettes into his case, and went downstairs into the night. Out in the street he shivered in spite of his coat, for the air struck cold. He walked rapidly up Chancery Lane to the Tube. In the train he sat next to a curate who was reading a copy of the *Backwash*. The sight of the paper made him think of Mary Drummond's husband, whose degradation helped to create the *Backwash*. He thought of the drunken clever man shut up

in Scroyle's office with a bottle, writing the witty article at which the curate was smiling. He wished that he had read some of Drummond's things. They would have helped him to understand Mrs. Drummond, whose winning, eager beauty came back to him now with enough force to make him wish her to be at home. There were points about Mrs. Drummond which he could not explain to himself. He felt that there was something wanting in her. Some magic was lacking in her. She left him cold. He wondered upon what rock, or mud, her marriage had been wrecked. He stole a furtive glance at the *Backwash* in the curate's hand. It looked like any other monthly review. The only distinctive mark which he could see was a bright green star, about the size of a four-shilling piece, on the front page. "Price 2s. 6d." was embossed in white upon this star. There was a table of contents below it.

"I beg your pardon," said Lionel to the curate. "Would you let me see the contents list on the front page of your paper?"

"Certainly," said the curate, handing it over. Lionel scanned the list. A sonnet called "Agnus Castus" by one St. Clair Drummond, figured there; between a paper on "The Black Cat in Modern Symbolism" and the translation of a brief, eerie romance, "The Rose of Passion," by one Becquer, of whom Lionel had read the day before. "Thank you very much," he said, handing back the paper. "An interesting number." The curate smiled, and assented. He thought in his mild little heart that this bronzed young man looked liker a son of Belial than one of the children of light.

"What do you think of the poem?" said Lionel.

"By Drummond?" said the curate. "I haven't read it yet; but he has a very scrupulous mind. Most scrupulous. Most beautiful." He said it with clerical

finality; that was the orthodox view; if Lionel dissented, he was done for, here and hereafter.

"Don't you think he's a little too monastic to dramatise his personality successfully?" Lionel asked, hoping to have the parable of Drummond expounded to him.

"As to monastic," said the curate. He paused. Monastic was an extreme term. He would have said perhaps contemplative. "Yes," he went on. "His ideas are unworldly. I am sure that he would look on any intrusion of his personality into his poetry as unfortunate."

"I would like to discuss that point with you," said Lionel. "It opens up the whole difference between ancient and modern art. But this is Marble Arch. I must get out here." He nodded to the clergyman and hurried out. Glancing back, as he walked along the platform, he saw the clergyman staring after him. "He takes me for Drummond," said Lionel to himself. "I've shattered an ideal there."

After about ten minutes of walking he found himself outside the door of Mrs. Drummond's flat, wondering whether he were doing a rude thing in calling thus. He hesitated for a moment, fearing lest he should annoy her. But he wanted to talk with a woman at any cost. He wouldn't turn back now. He pressed the button of the bell. An elderly maid appeared. She was a rather tall, pleasant-featured woman, with a big, plain pale face and small brown eyes. Lionel, who was always on the look-out for symptoms from which his mind could learn the truth, was well impressed by this symptom. This woman was an honest, capable servant. None but the good are well served.

Beyond her, a passage stretched down the flat. Its walls were covered with a pale brown holland. They were hung at intervals with Arundel Society reproductions from Italian Masters. "Yes, Mrs. Drummond

was in. What name could she say, please?" Lionel gave the woman a card. She went down a passage to the right. He waited just inside the door, staring at a bare-legged saint in green. He had no great opinion of saints, but the drawing made him glad that he belonged to a race that could do such things. "Minds without littleness," he muttered. The servant asked him to follow her.

As he followed the servant down the passage, he noticed that the floor was covered with a white straw-matting. It gave the passage a trim, light, cleanly neatness. Like the holland on the walls, it appealed to Lionel because it was a part of a woman's thought; and her home. The whiteness of the doors, the creamier whiteness of the matting, and the paleness of the holland, what was he to deduce from them? What was the mind which chose these? A lover of light, a hater of dust, and unusual. The door opened. In five seconds more he was in Mrs. Drummond's presence, shaking hands with her, and apologising for his presence there.

She was dressed in the black silk which she had worn the night before. She sat on a big, straight sofa, which had been drawn in front of the fire. The room was rather dark. It was only lit by the fire and by a reading lamp with a green shade. Lionel noticed shelves of books running all round the room. He got an impression of white and black and green, all subdued and indeterminate, away from the glow in the grate. The lamp stood behind the sofa on a low table. Part of Mrs. Drummond's face was in shadow, part in warm light. A book which she had been reading lay open on the sofa beside her. It seemed to Lionel that her face had more colour than it had shown the night before.

"I mustn't sit down," he said. "I want to explain my coming here. I'm afraid I've made a mess of

things. You asked me to lunch with you on Friday, didn't you? Will you let me break my engagement? I've had to wire to my two friends to lunch with me at my rooms on that day. They won't be up long, and that may be their only free day. Do you mind? I thought it would be best if I came to explain to you in person. Do you think, Mrs. Drummond, you could be very kind and come on Friday to meet them? I was looking forward to seeing you. I shouldn't like to miss our talk. Do you think you could come?"

"I should like to, very much," she said. "But are you sure I shan't be in the way?"

"Women are the saving of a business meeting," he answered. "You may be quite sure that you'll make the only wise suggestions made. So will you come? I don't know whether we shall be able to join your organisation. I've been thinking about that. But we'll see on Friday. You'll come on Friday?"

"I should like to, very much."

"Right. I'm glad. I live in chambers in Pump Court, at the top of Number 4a. Do you know the Temple?"

"Yes. I used to live there. Do you lunch at one?"

"Yes. If that will suit you. Will it?"

"Yes. Thank you very much."

"Thank you," said Lionel. A suspicion crossed his mind, that he ought not to have called, that he ought to have written. "You don't mind my calling to explain?" he asked. "I hope I've not interrupted you."

"Not at all," she answered, smiling. They shook hands. He noticed that she wore no wedding ring. She wore only two rings. An old French ring, of tiny pearls and rubies, and a little thin gold thread which clasped a green pill of emerald. In another moment, he was out on the stairs, amid draughts which whisked his coat flaps. Sleet had begun to fall. The cold had

a rawness which touched the mind. The streets of the Portman Estate looked very cheerless, under the gas-lamps. They gave Lionel a sense of the preciousness of the home which he had just seen. Beauty and order were wonderful. What moved him was the beauty of mind which had built up that outward image of its order. The style of the woman's spirit was in every detail of the home, just as evidently as in her dress. Thinking of it, there in the cold, it all seemed to glow. Everything in the room was, very definitely, a thought from her brain, chosen and arranged by a special, personal, spiritual sensitiveness. It had been like being in her mind. The contrast of the glimmering streets, shining at corners with policemen's oilskins, and raw with the stink of fog, made him feel very homeless. A longing for wife and home took hold of him. Suppose that that home had been his, and that beautiful, grave lady his wife. To what new worlds of mind and soul would that room, and that companionship, be the stepping-stones? Suppose that he were now walking to such a home and to such a woman. Suppose that, when he reached his rooms, she should open the door to him.

When he reached his rooms, the fire was almost out. The sleet, dropping down the chimney, hissed as it fell. There were no letters. Groping for the lamp, he spilled an ash-tray containing the fag ends of cigarettes. Their poisonous frowsy stink nauseated him. It was like the essence of bachelorhood. He had walked all the way from the Mansions. It was nearly half-past ten. There was an hour to win through before bed gave him gaol delivery. He could not work. He could not think. He could only desire. Chewing a pipestem in the cold, he desired now one fair head now another till it was time to go to bed.

CHAPTER III

IN the morning he was still haunted by that desire. He conjured up the images of women. He imagined them gracing his lonely breakfast table, putting a spirit into things. He thought of the room which made the setting for Mrs. Drummond. His own bare soldierly quarters seemed a barrack by contrast. He was interested in Mrs. Drummond. He wanted to talk with her. He was moved by her. He was unbalanced; he was obsessed. He realised that he was not in a normal condition of mind about women. It was not talk he wanted. It was intimacy. These women, Miss Derrick and Mrs. Drummond, were too much in his thoughts. They were beginning to colour his ideas. Between them they represented Woman. Letting his mind dwell upon them rather longer than was wise, he discovered that his life was all starved and troubled by the want of Woman. His mind caressed their images, very tenderly, endowing, now one, now the other, with qualities not of this world. Going to his piano he played a little Chopin, while his housekeeper cleared the table. Music was one of his delights. Music now, in his first few days at home, after so long an absence abroad, was a wonder as well as a delight. Each note was a delightful new footstep in the mind, something bright and light, coming quickly. Merely to finger a note, to strike it repeatedly, wondering at the tone, the musical tone, after all the uncouth noise, was like discovery. He fingered the notes delightedly, realising fully, for the first time, what a miracle music is. The notes seemed to strike right through to the marrow. He played a favourite movement with an appreciation

so perfect that it gave him understanding. He played a phrase which especially moved him. He struck it with one finger. What was it like? He played it again. It was like a sudden little plaintive eddy, caught into a man's mind amid the tumult of spate. The suggestion of immense force suddenly concentrated on the tiny. The sudden passing from leisure to a swiftness beyond speech. The sudden passing from tumult to the indescribably still. There was a murmuring first, deep calling to deep, echoings, rushings, hurryings, swift splashings, floggings of boughs in currents, all the tumult of water. Suddenly it was all put aside. A little tiny twirl of it was emphasised suddenly. The flood became nothing. One was left staring with all one's might at a weak little twirl in the backwash. He was pleased when he had thought it out. He felt that consciousness of power which the right understanding of a thing alone gives. He stared out of his window over the Temple prospect. He had another thing to think out.

Wasteful, sprawling London lay below him. The roar of it never stopped. It was like a great wasteful, blatant beast. Down there in the grime were two classes of people. There was a class which bought leave to live, asking no terms. There was another, much smaller class, which bought leave not to bother, asking no questions. There they were, brutal, callous. And this was the twentieth century, when man was coming to his inheritance. Thompson, Mechnikov, Ross, Bruce, Marconi, all these wonderful brains were alive, turning light into darkness. They had proved that darkness need not exist. That one has only to turn on the light, and take one's place. And out there in the fog the old Satanic wallow was going on. The blindness and hugeness of the wallow seemed the more awful from the littleness of the bit he saw. A barrister in a wig crossed

the court and vanished. Clerks passed. Office boys passed. Postmen passed. They passed, and others came, always the same, always different, out of the night of the fog, into the night of the fog, as though life were the passage from fog to fog, and fog life's cause, and life's end. What could alter it? What could move it? Who was strong enough to tackle that brutality and blindness? Who could change the sprawling to marching, and the waste to use? So much life was going on, and so little of it was being lived. Life? It was not life. It was a tide-meet and welter, making it impossible for life to be. The word was After us the Deluge, not With us the beginning of a New Earth.

He, and his cousin Fawcett, and Naldrett were to fire off a few little crackers at the monster. Fawcett, correct, calm, ardent, but without capacity for action. How would cousin Leslie tackle the wallow there? Not much would be done by cousin Leslie.

Naldrett was the other ally. Roger Naldrett the writer. He had many memories of Naldrett, and much affection for him. What was Naldrett? He was intolerant, literary, suspicious, so nervously sensitive that life was hell to him. An intellect naturally good all tattered into rags with literature. A mind of ideas all dabbled in the literary paint-box. A sea-anemone kind of mind, with a lot of red jelly tentacles groping in all directions, without plan, for diatons. So much for Naldrett. How would Roger Naldrett tackle the wallow there? Not much would be done by Roger Naldrett.

The day after to-morrow Naldrett and Fawcett would be with him, there, in that room, eagerly talking. He told himself that he ought not to be judging their capacities. The work would test those. What he ought to be judging was the original plan suggested and approved, only a few nights before, round Leslie's fire in

Ireland. It had been agreed then that the need of the age was a laboratory for the training of scientists, and a paper for the discussion and testing of advanced scientific theory. Intellect with an aptitude for art, or law, or war, or theology, has its organisation, its endowments, its certain prospects. Intellect with an aptitude for science has to wander unhelped, or to fix itself, like a parasite, on the old, rich, dying, decaying trunks. The time has come for science to turn man's eyes from his present ease to his possibilities, and to lift him along the road a little. That was their task. To teach man that Science, the cleanly, fearless thing, is the religion of these times, not only promising, but able to grant, here and now, the Earthly Paradise. Was that worth doing? Yes. Very well worth doing. Was it all that could be done? They were three together, they were young, they were mighty. Thinking it over there, by the window, Lionel saw that it was much; but that it did not tax the strength, it was not all that might be tried. It smacked too much of teaching. The thing to do was to leave teaching to the impotent, and to strive to put Science in her place, in the council, on the throne, and at the altar, where the vatic queenly priestess belonged. That was the manly thing to try. To tackle this purblind world, and heave it over, and burn the carrion off its soul, and give it faith, a new body, new freedom, delight. His pulse quickened. His eyes began to kindle. That would be the noble thing. To upset the present holders of power so that the scientist might reign. That was the only thing worth doing. And they would shirk it, as too big. They would fear the vested interest. They would knuckle under to the brute and the fool. They would judge it meeter to issue a little penny weekly of advanced scientific theory.

He had been a soldier. He knew that life is very

like war, and that a man never achieves all that he sets out to do. But he knew that the only men who do anything at all are those who set out to do something Titanic. Why should not they be such men?

Something of the kind had been suggested among them; not the thing itself, but some shadow of it. Cousin Leslie had said that the great thing was not to confuse the issues, that their duty was to define a possibility, and, especially, not to mix the purely creative with the controversial. Naldrett had claimed that controversy was waste of energy. Energy, he claimed, was the quality of life. The duty of energy was to create forms of energy. If it took to destruction, instead of to creation, it became the evil it destroyed. That, in short, a man's duty was to establish a positive good, and to trust that that little leaven might in time leaven the whole lump. "Thus it is in a decadence," said Lionel. "Men get too wise, and God destroys them." He felt very lonely. He had been lonely for twelve years. It gave him a pang, a little sharp accentuation of his loneliness, to think of Mrs. Drummond, so winning and gracious, so attractive, beautiful a figure, to a man alone in chambers, planning a war. The thought of doing it for her, or with her, helped by her, was sweet. The thought of laying it at her feet, when done, was sweet. But then she had her own schemes. And rising up before the image of Mary Drummond was always the fleshly screen of Drummond. She belonged to another man. He could make no love-offerings to Mary Drummond. There would be strict bounds even to a friendship with her. One would have to avoid so much. One could come such a little way towards her for fear of trespassing over sacred borders. Rhoda Derrick? He wanted an asylum for his affections, poor man. He had not thought of Rhoda Derrick as a possible help. All that a bachelor in Lionel's condition needs is an

asylum for his affections. It is not much. It is readily found. A wax-model, a lay figure, a doll, an idol, will serve, for the time. Tragedy comes when such things are mistaken for the real need of life, a help and inspiration.

He had not judged Rhoda as he would have judged a male acquaintance, however slight. His mind let her image pass unquestioned in a rather rosy mist. Her attractiveness had put his intellect off its guard. His life was an enthusiastic application of the desire to heal. He was neither dull nor shallow. But one side of him was starved. A woman meant so much more to him than to a man in normal social relations. When a woman spoke to him his mind felt too strongly the fascination of her being as a woman to consider her as an intellect or as a person. Intellect and personality, he had himself. He found in Rhoda something exquisitely feminine. He was starving for the exquisitely feminine. She was, as it were, food to his hunger. His craving was too real for him to criticise what appeased it. A woman who touches any one of a young man's heart-strings is often credited by him with the power of touching all. Who has not mistaken a little beauty, a pure voice, a dainty dress, blue, lovely eyes, and a bewitching shy humour, all the exquisitely feminine of her, for an essential noble womanliness? Who can see through such many-coloured gauze, when the blood is blinding the eyes?

Rhoda came into his mind now, a beautiful feminine image, in an exquisite blue veil, smelling faintly of lavender and of verbena. He did not think of her as helping him. His intellect had sufficient tact for that, blinded as it was. Only in his loneliness he felt how meet it would be to be inspired by her, to wear one of her (probably very expensive) pale fawn gloves, in his helmet or somewhere, to have her beauty, at the least,

to look at, work for, and worship, even in the thick of the fight.

The images of the two women determined him in the end. He would go into this thing. He would do what he could alone. He did not, as yet, see all that the battle would involve. At the first planning of a thing a man sees his mark and his triumph. He sees his difficulties later. Lionel saw only this, that it would be a great thing to do and a big stand-up fight. And for that fight some one would have to create money, and the means of swaying the public. He would. Nobody else was eager. Nobody else cared. The nation was rotting with syphilis, and dying of cancer, and putting itself out with pthisis. And nobody cared. They would go to the trouble to stamp out rabies from their kennels and allow three-fifths of the nation's youth to grow up with neither teeth nor bones.

As for triumph. There was no sense in expecting triumph. There would be no personal triumph. The triumph would be for England. England would be leading the world. She would be the first nation in history to occupy herself with the perfection of human life. What he was going to do would be more than an agitation. It would be a crusade. It would be an intellectual movement bigger than anything since the French Revolution. It would be the first recorded attempt to make science as potent in human affairs as the church and the police.

He was lured away from reality at this point. He saw the world regenerate with a new enthusiasm. Soldiers, sailors, lawyers, merchants, and parsons had ruled the roost in the past. The parsons had had a big idea. The others had had their virtues, they had been manly and quick. But all of them had been intent on the obtaining or maintenance of power. They had not cared for life. They had not improved

life. They had obtained or maintained power. It had never once occurred to them that all this genuflection, marching, battering, bartering, and conveyancing were so many blinkers to keep man in the gutter. They had said their say and left their mark. Man was in his gutter, well-blinkered. Suppose that a new ruling caste should arrive, now. A caste of those who not only believed, but knew, that life, besides being mystery and beauty beyond thought, was a thing to be improved beyond imagination, by a wise handling of already acquired knowledge.

Suppose that for the first time in the world's history there should be a ruling caste vitally concerned with life; not bothering about power, not troubling much about a problematic hereafter, but striving with all the energy of alert intellect to improve life, to forbid vile forms and ways of life, to foster those forms which might tend to make the world memorable among planets. What are those forms? Only the knowledge of God really counts. And what is the knowledge of God? What is the knowledge of man? A fineness and quickness in apprehending the nature of the spirit from the nature of its manifestations. Scientists passed their days seeking to discover the laws of life, and to apprehend means of direct communion with Life. Already a man might take acquired knowledge, and pronounce from it the nature of the obedience exacted in return for life. If this new caste were to have the direction of the world, how soon would the nature of life become apparent. How soon would man apprehend the chemistry which makes quick, changing the invisible tadpole into Cæsar, Luther, Buonarrotti, Newton?

CHAPTER IV

THAT night the fog came down to stay. Lionel built up his fires shivering. As he drew his curtains his windows showed him a blur of glow, a luminous heart in the gloom. It was the lamp in the street outside. "Coming on thick," said Lionel to himself. The street lamp looked like a bad soul fast in the slough. It was not like light. Gradually it narrowed to a point. Noise ceased. The opaqueness seemed to smother, to muffle, to stifle, to make all a blur, even sound, even will. It floated indoors, making the eyes smart, the nostrils sore. The lamps indoors were dimmed. A room became like a little vault in a pyramid, where people hid from the plague.

So the night passed, and the next day and yet another night, foulness, rolling down noiselessly, blotting out the blur of lamps, anon lifting, yellowish, livid, poisonous, then blackening down again. Lionel built good fires, and withdrew all that he had ever said against the sun. Sitting over the fire, with a drawing-board across his knees, he wrote his plans of campaign. He thought things out. He invented reasons against them, and the logical answers to those reasons. Having got his main idea, he had only to apply it to life. His friends were going to write about the beauty of science. They would appeal to Little London, to the five thousand cultured people (mostly women) who keep intellect alive among us. Let them. But for his own part, he would appeal to the herd. He would build up a cheap press to win the crowd. He had money enough to start a paper, a little paper. Had he? He wasn't sure how

much a paper would cost to start. That was one of the things the company would discuss at lunch.

The thought of lunch reminded him. Would his people come? It was not the day one would choose for going out to lunch. He might put Mrs. Drummond out of the reckoning. How about the others? They were to have crossed from Ireland during the night. Had they crossed? The paper said that the boat service had been suspended. The fog was everywhere. The Holyhead boats had not started. The Northern boats had not started. The chances were that his friends were delayed on the other side. It was strange that they hadn't telegraphed. As they hadn't telegraphed, he ought to prepare for them. He rang for Mrs. Holder, and gave her his orders for the lunch. He got out his microscope and worked at Protozoa. He was working out a theory of the Universe from the data of the microcosm. It sounded a little fantastic; but he wanted to establish the principle, that life is one, but divisible, and that the great puzzles of life are explicable by the minute puzzles already solved. He glanced up from his work from time to time, shivered at the gloom without, and thought of the Indian sun, wrinkling the air over the desert. Ten passed. Eleven passed. It was markedly lighter. Going up to the window he saw across the court the lights in the chamber windows. A drowned-looking tree drooped. Human beings passed. It was clearing. The rawness of the cold drove him back to the fire again. He shuddered at the rawness. It got right into his marrow. If it were warmer he would be able to have some music. Music. A little Schumann. He opened his piano, but could not face the cold there. He went back to the fire. It grew steadily lighter. His spirits rose. It was going to clear up. There would be a sun, not a real sun, but still a disc or a brightness. Mrs. Drummond would

come. His clock struck once for eleven thirty. It was worth going out for a turn.

He put on his thickest coat. He felt the cold dreadfully after Africa. He took a handbag with him. He would walk to Covent Garden and buy a few flowers and some fruit. In a minute or two he was in the Strand, crossing a road which seemed to have been buttered and then munched. The lamps were burning. It was not yet day. Darker patches of fog glowered ominous on the north side. He crossed to them. He walked up Drury Lane into darkness. He turned off to the left into night. People passed him. A market car-man, sawing at his horse's mouth, cursed the time. At a jam in the traffic a policeman restored order. "Go round by Market Street," he was saying. "There's no entrance this side. You know that's well's I do." "Ow'm I to go round by —— Market Street," came the answer, "when there ain't no —— road in Market Street?" It seemed final. Lionel collided with some one. "I say, I'm sorry," he cried. "I'm sorry," said the stranger. "Pretty thick," said Lionel. The stranger coughed, assenting. He turned suddenly into a doorway at the left. Beyond the door fronting the road was a window brilliantly lit with green-shaded electric lamps. White letters were on the window-pane—"THE BACKWASH. The Best Monthly Review. Leonard Scroyle, Publisher." So that was Scroyle's office. A cabman came downhill, leading his horse. The noise of the Strand was strangely like the noise of a river. Boats were washing past; there came hails. One expected the thrash of screws; the blast of the siren. Lionel slipped across a buttery road to a row of yellow blurs. Horses slithered tentatively out of the gloom. Men, tramping forlornly, one foot on the kerb, one in the gutter, led them silently. Black filaments floated. The eyes burned. Cries and calls sounded.

They were like the fog croaking to itself. A loafer, link-boy, shoe-black, something predatory, flogged his arms thrice swiftly as Lionel passed. "Bit of all right, ain't it, sir," he called. Some glimpse of Lionel showed under the lamp, perhaps nothing more than something kindly in the poise of the head, which roused the man's instinct. "Beg yer pardon, sir," he went on, with the beggar's swiftness and insistence. "Sir, you not got such a thing as a pair of ole shoes to give away, sir! wouldn't ask, on'y my pair—" The patter rattled out with the smoothness of long practice. "I haven't," said Lionel, diving into the unknown. "Yah, bleedin' toff," came the answer. There was a pause. The man groped for a repartee. Lionel found himself inside the market. Wavy threads of fog floated, moist-black, in front of him. Flares hissed. Wet dirty dead bits of greens gave the place a flavour of kitchen refuse. There was nothing of flower or fruit in the manners of the stall-keepers. They seemed to have no illusions left. In the murk of fog, dimming even the flares, in the wet discomfort, stinking of cabbage, they kept watch. "Yn't it awful?" one woman called. "Te bad," another answered. "D'yer see Al this mornin'?"

"Chice me. Not awf," replied her friend. Lionel paused at the stall.

"Annie, there's a genelem wytin'."

"Yes, sir. Wot can I get you, sir?"

Lionel bought some big white chrysanthemums, some small yellow ones, and one big brown one like a mop. He also bought a few pears. Glancing at the market entrance, he was surprised to see the loom of buildings beyond.

"It's clearing up," he said.

"Time it did clear up. It's bin somethin' crool," said the woman. Lionel paid and went. Somehow her words cheered him. "Time it did clear up." "Time

it cleared." "Time we had a spell of fine." How many times had he heard the phrases? In England it was always time. England was always ripe for a change. Perhaps she was. She hadn't that name, but she might be. What if she were all the time longing for a change, and all the time too stupid, or too patient, or too industrious to define her longing?

The fog was slowly lifting. It was passing away to the north. Its going was not final: it was for the moment only. Menace of more was everywhere, in the sky, lowering on the roofs, wherever Lionel looked. The air was foul. It seemed to corrode the nostrils. It was raw, cuttingly chill, and charged with poisons. Lionel walked down Fleet Street for a short distance, glanced at the file of a paper in a newspaper office, and returned to his room. Church bells played the chime of the quarter past twelve. A telegram was on his table. "From Mrs. Drummond," he murmured, taking it. He opened it.

It was dated Northern Counties Station, Belfast. It was brief and to the point. "Delayed by fog. Keep Sunday and Monday free. Naldrett." It had been handed in at Belfast more than an hour before. He had expected it; yet he was disappointed. Now he would have to telegraph to Mrs. Drummond not to come. But was it necessary? Would she be coming? She wouldn't start in fog like this. It was strange that she had not telegraphed already. If he went out to telegraph he would be sure to pass a message from her. He maligned the fog. Now he wouldn't see her. Well, he would have to telegraph to be on the safe side. It wouldn't get to her in time to stop her. But there, the fog was gathering again. She wouldn't come. He went to the telegraph office in Fleet Street and sent a telegram. "My friends detained by fog. Willingly absolve you if you prefer come Monday. Heseltine."

No telegram came for him while he was out. The fog was settling down again. He built up the fire, and arranged his chrysanthemums. Mrs. Holder came in to lay the table.

"Will your friends be coming, Mr. Heseltine?" she asked, having seen the telegram. "A day like this, it's se bad going anywhere. Oh, it is reelly."

"Mr. Naldrett and Mr. Fawcett won't be here, Mrs. Holder. The lady may be. I've not heard. Better lay for two, in case."

"I sent my girl out," said Mrs. Holder, "just to get a few things. But one 'as to go se far for things here, Mr. Heseltine. Oh, one reelly 'as. An' she ses to me, 'Mother,' she ses, 'it's se thick I reelly don't like going.' And you know it is, sir. It reelly is. It's not nice weather for any young girl to be out. Why, she might be run over, you know, sir. Girls are se silly. They reelly are. They're not fit to be trusted. I say nothing against my girl. She's been a good daughter to me. But you know, sir, if she went out, an a motor car was to run over 'er leg, why, there'd be an end, sir. Girls are se silly." She smoothed down the wrinkles in the cloth, and turned to the sideboard to arrange the fruit. She began to probe for information.

"Will it be Mrs. Fawcett, sir, the lady wot's coming?" she asked.

"No," he answered.

"I thought, sir, as you'd mentioned Mr. Fawcett, perhaps it was Mrs. Fawcett. Will the lady take wine, Mr. Heseltine? I put the claret down by the fire all ready."

"Right. I'll make the coffee, Mrs. Holder."

"Thank you, sir. Will the lady sit back to the fire, sir?"

"No. Lay at the ends." She laid at the ends. By and by she began again.

"You'll want another lamp in, sir. You reelly will. It's like night. I should 'ardly think the lady would venture out, sir."

Lionel looked out of the window. It was already night there. He could not see across the court.

"What's the time, Mrs. Holder?"

"Five minutes to one, sir. But I shan't be ready to dish up, sir, not for another ten minutes. I said to myself, sir. Wot with this fog, and one of them a lady, they're sure not to be punctual, not to the minute of one."

"Well. We must wait." He went to his room to wash the fog from him. The church bells chimed the hour. The muffling of gloom drooped thicker. Intangible felt was noiselessly cloaking London. He surveyed his dinner-table. It looked pretty. He had some good old silver and glass. He removed the lamp. He brought out his silver candlesticks with the rose shades. They gave a glow of colour. No telegram had come for him. It was ten minutes past. She would have had his telegram by this time.

"Shall I dish up, sir?" said Mrs. Holder.

"Wait five minutes more," he said. He stared at the Correggio which hung over his mantelpiece. It was a fine thing. The drawing of the Child's foot and ankle was so wonderful, and then the character in the Virgin's mouth. Correggio was said to be "soft." There was intellect as well as grace in this thing. A fine thing. Correggio could paint. Lionel loved the picture. There was a romance about it. One of his ancestors had come by it, rather strangely, under tragic circumstances. It was a strange story. Correggio's gentle mind would have been touched by it. Lionel stared at the Virgin's face, wondering at the completeness of the artist's vision. He had made her, definitely, a woman, moulded by life in this world to the endurance

of womanhood, and yet, he had given her divinity, a rapture and consecration. It was clever of him, too, to have concentrated all his intellect upon the woman, while concentrating all his picture upon the child. It was a very noble picture. Lionel cared for it because it bore witness to the possibility of the perfection of man's mind. It was perpetual evidence that thought could be more real than nature.

"I won't wait any longer, Mrs. Holder," he called. "It's no good waiting. I'll have lunch." He sat down. Mrs. Holder brought filleted plaice. "I might have had it five minutes ago," he grumbled, to allay her. "Mrs. Holder, you are a wonder. How long did it take you to arrange this dish?"

"Oh, that's only a minute's job, sir. You jest fold the napkin and put on a bit of parsley."

"But I like it. It's so dainty. You ought to be doing for a duke, Mrs. Holder."

"Oh, sir. It's nothing, sir, that isn't."

"Where did you learn these things, Mrs. Holder?"

"As a girl, sir. I was with a family near Oxford, sir. An army family. Gen'l Piddington the name was. I don't know if you've ever heard of him, sir. Very good general they said he was, sir. Very clever hat it. In India, I think I heard one of them say. But I was on'y a girl in them days. I didn't know much about no generals." Lionel had not heard of Piddington. Earth must be rich with the remains of Piddingtons. He concentrated on the dish again.

"I don't think many girls, nowadays, learn how to do these things," he said. It was what is called a friendly lead.

"No, sir. Girls are se silly now, sir. Oh, sir, they reelly are." Mrs. Holder gathered away the fish-dish. "And you know, sir, things are done for girls now, sir, which there wasn't in my day. Yet, d'you think I

could trust my girl to get ready a pudding for you, sir, or even so much as to boil you a egg for your breakfast? No, sir. You know, sir, I reelly couldn't. I'd be ashamed to tell you how little my girl can do about a 'ouse. That's the new education, sir." What would happen to a poor bachelor when the old education became extinct? There came a knock at the door without. It was a refined, almost timid knock. It was not the knock of a messenger boy.

"There she is," said Lionel to himself.

"To think she's been out in this. What a dreadful journey she must have had, sir," said Mrs. Holder, wobbling off into the passage. Lionel rose and took up a position at the fire. He heard the outer door open. He heard a voice and a rustle. An umbrella went into the stick-rack. There was a moment's hesitation. "I'll just hang it up, mum," said Mrs. Holder's voice. A low voice answered. The door opened. Mrs. Drummond came in quickly, holding out a hand from which she had already stripped the glove. "How d'you do?" she said. Her senses were alert for the other guests.

"Mrs. Drummond," said Lionel, shaking hands. "The party has gone to pieces. My friends aren't here. I telegraphed to you the moment I heard from them. But I suppose I was too late. Are you frozen? Look here. Come and get warm. I'd begun lunch. I was praying you hadn't started. I say. You oughtn't to have come. Look here. How did you manage to get here? A day like this." He drew up his best chair to the fire for her. She stood glancing about.

"What a jolly big room," she said, twisting up her veil. "You know, it was quite clear when I started. I must have just missed your telegram. I came by the circle from Baker Street." She stripped her other glove. They were big brown gauntlet gloves lined with fur. She laid them together on the mantelpiece. "It's so

nice having gloves too big to leave behind," she said. She caught sight of the Correggio. "Do let me see your picture," she said, leaning forward eagerly. She examined it. "Is it Parmignano?" she asked, turning swiftly. She was a little nervous. Lionel lifted two of the candles. "It's a small Correggio," he said. "It's not in very good condition." They looked together. She wore black over a white blouse brodered with roses at the throat. She wore a brooch made from an aureus of Augustus. Something in the softness of her gaze touched Lionel. It was so much an eagerness of soul. He felt suddenly a little ashamed of a want of similar eagerness in many of the pursuits of life.

"It is very beautiful," she said, simply. "How good the child is!" Mrs. Holder was waiting for her.

"Would the lady like her boots dried?" said Mrs. Holder, using the oblique attack through Lionel. "If you would like to take them off, mum, I've got a good fire ready. My girl would lend a pair of slippers." Mrs. Drummond thanked her, but her boots were not at all wet.

"I think you'll find everything ready then, sir," said Mrs. Holder. "Will you please ring, when you're ready for the fowl?" She went out to her preparations, relieved that her lodger, whom she called, in her heart, "that poor young man alone in London," had not fallen a victim to a Baggage.

"You must be half-dead," said Lionel, as they sat down. "I wish I'd had the sense to go to look for you at the Temple Station. How did you find your way? Oh! But of course you know the Temple. I'm afraid this fish won't be very nice. I'm so worried about my telegram not reaching you. Look here, Mrs. Drummond, will you promise to come to meet my friends on Sunday or Monday?"

"No. I'm afraid I can't on either day," she

answered. "Could you bring them to see me, the week after?"

"If they're up," he promised, "I should be delighted." She glanced at the Correggio. Each was a little nervous that the other was nervous. Mrs. Drummond, woman fashion, endeavoured to end the nervousness by getting him to talk of himself.

"Will you tell me how you got your Correggio?" she said. "Did you get it?"

"No, I didn't get it. It was left to me. It's rather a curious story. By the way, will you drink claret or mineral water?"

"Plain water, thank you." He filled her glass.

"Do you paint, Mrs. Drummond? You do, don't you?"

"No. Not now. I used to."

"People ought to be made to paint," said Lionel. "They ought to learn to paint before they learn to read. Reading is the curse of the age. Sport and tobacco and reading. They enable men to do nothing pleasantly. Reading rots the mind. I hope you never read, Mrs. Drummond."

"Do you call Reports of Commissions reading?"

"No. Those I call drama. But don't you agree with me? Drawing exercises mind and hand. Reading indulges the mind, and helps it to many other indulgences. What would you teach children, Mrs. Drummond?"

"I could not bear to teach children anything in London," she answered. "A child's first teaching ought to be from nature, and physical. Its little body ought to be taught to have teeth and strong little bones, and eyes. What is the good of trying to train a mind when the little body is full of poison which is fretting the brain? But won't you tell me about your picture?"

"The picture," said Lionel, as the fowl was brought

in, " was originally painted by Correggio for the Count of Matole. It was in the house of the Counts of Matole, near Rivoli, for a couple of hundred years. Then the family came rather to grief or died out, and the picture passed to a daughter who had married a landowner at a place called Poggi, near Alexandria. This was all worked out years ago. It's absolutely certain truth. Then towards the end of the Revolutionary Wars, Napoleon invaded Lombardy to attack the Austrians. My mother's grandfather, a man named Huntley, was serving with the Austrians. He was on the staff of their general. Melas I think his name was.

"Are you interested in war at all? It was rather an interesting war. Napoleon got right round the Austrian rear, and then divided his army. And the Austrians attacked one of the divisions at a place called Marengo. Napoleon's white horse was called after the battle. I daresay you'll remember. Marengo is just beside Poggi. The battle was at its worst just to the north of Poggi. The French got beaten there, and had to fall back. Later in the day, they won, of course, but at first they were repulsed. Well. Just when they fell back, my great grandfather with the rest of the Austrian staff stopped in a garden at Poggi, outside a burning house. They were dismounted, having something to eat. And he came across the body of a girl, with long fair hair, lying dead in the grass with her head on the picture there. I suppose she'd carried out the picture when the house was set on fire, and then a ball had hit her. She was quite dead. My great grandfather knew something about pictures. He took the picture and a lock of the woman's hair, intending to find her relatives after the battle. You see. He made sure that the relatives would be in Alexandria, and that the war would end that afternoon. But more French troops came up and the battle began again, and the Austrians were smashed.

And he didn't get back to Poggi for thirteen years, and then it was too late. The picture's history is on a parchment at the back of the panel. He was able to verify that easily enough. But he could find no trace of any living claimant, nor even who the woman was. So he stuck to it, and there it is. Strange and sad, don't you think? Yet if you look at it, it's not like a story, it's like a picture. If I published the story, there'd be three pictures on it in next year's Academy."

"Pathetic," said Mrs. Drummond. "How ghastly war is. What happened to the lock of hair?"

"Here," said Lionel, going to the mantel and unlocking a little silver box which stood there. He took out a glass locket in which the lock of hair had been curled. "You see," he said; "curious, isn't it? That's the only real thing about Marengo now existing, and even that's all due to Correggio's having been taught to draw."

"How beautifully fine it is," said Mrs. Drummond. "It's like a child's."

"Yes. It's very fine hair. It must have gone with a very delicate skin. And one can't have any physical fineness without some inner quality which it expresses. She must have been very delightful. Quite slight, don't you think, but very delightful?"

"Quite slight, and fond of music."

"The Orpheo, on a spinet. What was the music then? She was conventional."

"Not even that in 1800. That came later. Conventual."

"Yes. Yes. Conventual." He smiled at the little pun. "She had a very white little bedroom."

"Do you really believe in the physical expressing the mental or spiritual?" Mrs. Drummond asked.

"Yes," said Lionel. "You can tell a man's nerves from his teeth, and his brain from his nose, and his

intellect from his mouth. And his faith—what d'you tell his faith from? What do you, Mrs. Drummond?"

"His voice, I think. You get all the character in the voice."

"Supposing you're deaf?"

"Then you get the sixth sense worth all the others put together. Then you divine instead of deducing."

"Yes. You divine. How fine people are when their bodies have been all bred away, just up to the danger point." He rang for the tart. "Mrs. Drummond," he went on suddenly. "Do you take a gloomy view of things? As the journalist asked my friend, are you morbid? Are you?"

"No," said Mrs. Drummond, smiling. "You mean, am I pessimistic? No. Only writers are pessimistic. There are many things in modern life which shock me and pain me unutterably. But then I feel there's all this passion for reforming the world. Don't you feel it? An enthusiasm for life, which is quite a new thing, something new in the soul?"

"It is only part of the disease," said Lionel. "That same enthusiasm. It means that the activities have no normal outlets, but are turned inward, and projected on an idea."

"I blame you for that," said Mrs. Drummond. "That's the science of the past generation. It is negative atheistic science, giving a physical reason for a spiritual condition. You and I are in another generation. Our science is positive and religious, don't you think? Science now is really aiming at doing just the reverse. Giving spiritual bases to physical conditions."

"Perhaps," he said, musing. He turned the conversation from the theoretical. "You were going to tell me something of what you are doing in this Public Health movement. I've been wondering about that.

What are your tactics going to be? Are you going to frighten people?"

"No," she said. "That would be a mistake. We want to make people think."

"I think you're wrong, Mrs. Drummond," he said. "You limit your appeal by that. You ought to make people act. The only people who think are the five thousand like you. And they'll think without help from you. The others, who don't think and can't think, have either to be jolly badly scared, or driven. And the reason I hold out against joining your movement is just that, that I'm afraid you are going to be too nice to people and that nothing will get done. Be still and strong, Mrs. Drummond. 'Bark an order and let the guns cough death.' Don't be nice to people. Scare the lives out of them, and make them nice to you."

By this time they were eating their pears. Lionel was warming to his talk, Mrs. Drummond was letting him run on, so that she might have his point of view. She liked him for his voice, for his confident youthfulness, and for a touch of feeling, hardly more than a tone, in his story of the picture. He reminded her a little of what had been attractive in the young man who had been so much to her. She found pleasure in the evidence of refinement, in the flowers, the glass, the old silver, in the manly neatness of the room. She was glad that the young man maintained a standard of life, even in chambers. She liked him for drinking only water, and for the niceness of his manners. As yet her mind was a little puzzled by him. She was not sure how far his occasional cynicism was to be taken as evidence of character. Like most women, she divined his capacity, more from his manner than from what he said, but her brain was that choice intellectual thing, the brain of a man, made finer and nobler by the discipline of womanhood. Her brain was testing him by a woman's high

standards. She liked him. There was something very nice about him. He had a winning way of leaning forward to listen, which came from the heart. It was genuine deference, a deference of the whole man. Yet there came into her spirit the suggestion of a want of scruple in him, the suggestion that he might perhaps do things, even fine unselfish things, without a scrupulous regard for the rightness and fineness of his methods in the doing of them. That pained her, for she was one of those very noble women to whom life is a sacrament. Any failure to realise the significance of the moment in its relation to the day seemed to her to be a surrender of shining frontiers.

"Won't you draw up to the fire, now," said Lionel. "I'll move this chair up. And I'll make coffee. You'll have some coffee?"

"Thank you," she said, taking the chair. Lionel knelt on the hearth-rug to thrust his kettle well into the blaze. She watched him with the feeling that he was a wayward boy, and that she ought to be stroking his head, as a mother does in stories.

"Mr. Heseltine," she went on, "you'll only look on me as a suppliant, won't you? I'm not trying to alter your views one little bit. I'm only asking because we are really comrades. Though perhaps you in your Nietzscheism won't admit that? You needn't be afraid that we shall be too nice to people. We've got to tell too many truths for that."

He handed her her coffee. "My friends will like you," he said. "You're quite right, I suppose. Only I can't see it your way. I'm afraid I'm a man of action. Action makes one narrow. But you won't persuade me, Mrs. Drummond. Doctoring isn't done by thought."

"It is a question of sowing so that the future may reap," she said.

"The past has never wished to reap," he said. "Why

should the future? Good comes as revolution, always. Christ comes as Anti-Christ, always. You don't believe in revolution?"

"No," she said. "It's too like shooting the dealer when you have bad cards. I feel that a reform's only lasting when it comes as thought, not as brutality."

"Yes," he said, whimsically. "But all thought worthy the name seems pretty brutal when it's new. By the way, I've got some marrons glacées. Will you have a marron? I'd forgotten I'd got marrons."

Mrs. Drummond took a marron. "A friend of mine used to say that all essentially national things leave the same flavour on the mind, and that one might just as well buy a marron glacée as a Fragonard. Do you feel like that?"

"No," said Lionel. "Were you thinking of offering me a rizotto for my picture?"

"No, I wasn't," she said, laughing a little. After a second's pause she went on. "Will you tell me," she asked, "about what you are doing? Are you doing any scientific work now? Or are you writing of what you discovered in Africa?"

"No," he said. "I'm at work on a theory. But it's nothing. And the African work was mostly done by my partner. The results are in the press. It will only be a little pamphlet, mostly diagrams. Somehow everything seems to end in a diagram. What shall we say? Everything which won't go into a diagram is wicked."

"It is more philosophic than the theory of ten years ago, 'everything which won't go into an epigram is silly.' I think that everythin which is thoroughly understood resolves itself into a diagram. You get the symbol of it. And when you haven't got the symbol of it, it's a sign that you still don't understand it, and that it is, in a way, 'wicked' to you. Because things

you don't understand have a way of hurting you. Haven't they?"

"Yes. It's lucky so much of life is simple. Understanding is the rarest thing. Or rather the ripening of understanding with the other faculties. Women understand. I feel a sort of shame at this moment, to think that you are probably reading me like a book. No. Putting me into a diagram. While I shall have to sit alone here, and go over all that you've said, before I begin to have any glimmering of what you are. Tell me, Mrs. Drummond, did you ever meet a man who 'understood' women. I don't mean the play-hero kind, who always seems to be saying, 'There. There. I know it's only your nerves.' I mean a man with imaginative sympathies tremendously alive. A woman always jumps one speech, if you see what I mean, in order to get to the one she utters. Did you ever meet a man who saw the speech the woman jumped, and could answer it off-hand? Really speak, I mean, with the woman's soul?"

"I think I see what you mean," said Mrs. Drummond. "Yes. I've met two men who made me feel that they 'understood.' One was hardly more than a boy."

"What impression had they on you? Do you mind my asking? Was it uncanny to you?"

"It was strange. One's point of view was accepted, and, as it were, sent back glowing. It was like talking with a woman. A woman soon realises in life that a certain amount of selfishness, or at least of personal assertion, is usual in a man. Often enough it is that which makes him so wonderful. And the want of that selfishness, in these two men, due in both cases to sickness, made them what they were, of course, but it also kept them from being the very finest things that a man may be."

"Living alone makes one realise the pathos and the

worth of women," said Lionel. "I've been wondering about them, and about us, too. Did you ever take the trouble to compare the politicians known to you with your woman friends?"

"No. I don't think I ever have," she said. "Is it so instructive?"

"It's a difference of the soul. Think of the women one knows. One feels humble before them. Perhaps it's because a woman's life is impossible without personal idealism. I believe that two women in Parliament would more than double the efficacy of the House. It would be such a jog to the men. They'd be in the presence of people with ideals. They'd feel themselves on trial."

"You don't believe much in Parliament?"

"I realise that things end there, Mrs. Drummond. So I've a certain respect for it. But it doesn't reduce itself to a diagram. It reminds me of two companies of buns flinging their currants at each other. I suppose we're rather like Carthage. No. We're better than that. No. I don't know that we are. We're not so hard. One reason why they're like buns is that they yield so to a little pressure. That's why you're making a mistake, Mrs. Drummond. Don't go putting more currants into them. But prick them and stick them and mark them with G, and pop them into the oven."

Mrs. Drummond rose. "I'm afraid I don't agree," she said. "But I must be going now. You'll come to see me, won't you? And bring your friends? I would dearly like to hear all about your scheme, even if we aren't to be allies. One gets such new draughts of life from all right enthusiasm. One feels it to be the symbol of so much, that lies beyond life."

"Women feel that more than men," said Lionel. He looked at her, wondering at woman's nobleness. For an instant the beauty of the eagerness in her face

touched him to awe and tenderness. There was more than beauty in her. There was the symbol of something beyond life. He realised, for that instant, what woman is. He understood why Michael Angelo, having done all things, was humble before the mute white mask of a woman lying dead there on the bed in Florence. "Sentiment," said his normal self. The something destructive in his brain quickly arrayed criticism against her. "The religious mind in woman," it said, "is Action, seen through sex." He would work out the epigram after she had gone. It was something like that. She wanted him to fold his hands and pray because that was the only way she herself could get things done. He was not just to her. His judgment was warped by his want. He wanted love. This gentle, wise priestess who disapproved even so mildly of thoughts which had had harsh birth in him, in places where thought in itself was a sign of manhood, seemed to him suddenly a little sentimental and insincere. He felt a fundamental antagonism of idea.

Coming back from the hall with her furs, this feeling was brushed aside by the sense of companionship. "Mrs. Drummond," he said. "You're going to protest; but it will avail you not at all. I am coming all the way home to your door with you. The fog's as black as ink. We'll go up Chancery Lane to the Tube." There were protestations, which he made of none effect. "In this competitive age," he said, "a fog is like any other suspension. There are attempts at a readjustment of distribution. I'm not going to have you taken by the throat and robbed. I'm responsible for you. Does fog affect your throat, Mrs. Drummond? Could I lend you a muffler?" He placed the warm cloak about her shoulders, noticing again, as he did so, the wonders of her hair, and that rarest of all rare beauties, never present, strangely, except with noble character,

small, lovely ears. He wondered how it felt to be, physically, something at once arresting and humbling. He wondered if women with this particular kind of spiritual beauty were ever troubled, as he was, by wants which made life difficult. "It is easy for you women," he thought, again unjustly, not realising the capacity for response of the quivering fine nerves at tension to the plectrum of life.

Outside, they were a little staggered by the blackness. It was darker than they had ever known it. In the doorway was a luminous haze. Beyond, night. They paused in the doorway. "Mrs. Drummond," he said, "I brought a silk handkerchief. I half expected this. Let me tie it over your mouth." She refused the offer, with a mental note of his thoughtfulness, which she afterwards remembered and gauged. "How kind of you to see me through this," she said. "I was afraid, all the time we were talking." Often the confession of a weakness wins friendship where a display of strength repels. He warmed to her. Here was something feminine for him to be male to. They stepped forward into the blackness. "Women aren't really afraid," he said. "You don't really fear anything, Mrs. Drummond. Isn't that it? Men fear things: women only fear the humiliation caused by them. That's why women sometimes don't foresee the humiliation. The cause may blind them. It is an entirely different point of view."

"I like to hear the law of my being expounded," said Mrs. Drummond, with an invisible smile. "But I've always heard that we are rebels." She gave a little cry, and almost fell. "Are you hurt?" he said. "No, thanks," she said. "I only caught my foot on the edge of a doorstep." "Won't you take my arm," he said. "At any rate till we're across Fleet Street." She took his arm. They went on together. He could not see

her. A light touch on his arm alone told him of her presence. It was as though these two minds were walking in some night of the soul. In Fleet Street, carriages stumbled on. Cries floated and answered, not like words, not like speech: like owls, like noise before speech was. Rumbling up out of the night a continual funeral loitered and rolled. Men were walking by their horses. They talked with awe to the policemen. They talked as though some one were dead, as though war had fallen.

"It is rather wonderful," said Mrs. Drummond. There was a pause in the traffic. They slipped across a buttery road. "Your foot's not hurting you?" Lionel asked. No, the foot was well.

"One would think," said Lionel, "that this kind of thing would be upsetting to business."

"But it is," she said, not quite following his mood. "The loss is dreadful."

"Why don't they try to stop it, then," said Lionel. "They don't. They blink like the owls they are, and hope that 'Government' will do something. It's as preventable as drought."

"May I give you a good scolding, Mr. Heseltine?" said Mrs. Drummond. "I feel that you aren't being just. We're in a very interesting state. Just in the last year or two we've discovered that we aren't the Breed and the People which we thought we were before the war. We've discovered that we're a very stupid, rude, idle, drunken, and uneducated people, engaged in breeding incompetents of all classes. We've had our waking up to the reality. But do give us credit for waking: No other nation in the world, so rich as this, would ever have woken. And give us credit, too, for the tremendous thing we are in spite of our faults. Even with the worst of the truth admitted we're far ahead of other nations. We may be behind in many

things. After all, human nature has not got very far yet. But the fact that we are conscious of our wants shows that we are trying to remedy them, and that we haven't lost our passion for rightness. You and I see our faults too clearly. In our passion to improve abuses we are apt to forget how good the main body is. But don't let us forget that. We enjoy a liberty and a leisure which no other nation in the world has approached even in idea. Do agree with me. We are all working now to make that liberty and leisure the birthright of every Englishman. And the stupid people who allow the fog to continue are just the very men who have won us the liberty and leisure to make the attempt."

"Perfectly true," he answered. "Man's an ungrateful beast. But you get your philosophy from Athens, Mrs. Drummond. I get mine from Germany. You can't get over fifteen degrees of latitude. What shall I say? You are full of the warm South." They entered the tube station.

In the train, they could not talk much. Lionel kept his brain alert with surmise as to the characters of the passengers. Like Blake, a century before, he found "marks of weakness, marks of woe," on each face there.

"City life leaves a want on each face, Mrs. Drummond," he remarked.

"I should say that a want leaves life in each face," she answered, smiling. He smiled; he acknowledged defeat. The train rattled and thundered. One had to shout to speak. There was no want in her face, only a summing up of achievement, and that confident eagerness for life which was like the spirit coming through the flesh. It is strange how very few look for life in a face. It is sad how rare a grace it is. Even vitality is scarce: but life, the spirit beyond vitality, "the lineaments of Gospel books." They came out of the lift into a

narrow road, in which one could see dimly an ugly church opposite the lights of a flower shop.

"It is clearing," said Lionel. "Shall I call a cab? You must be so tired."

"I'm not at all tired," she said. She had the tact not to attempt to dismiss him. "Let us walk there. Or are you tired?"

"I'd like to walk," he said. "The only drawback to walking is that it's bad for conversation. Or do you find it easy to walk and talk?"

"Yes. You see. I'm a woman."

"Talk is a Londoner's fresh air," said Lionel. "And how seldom one gets it. Only women talk. And to talk really well to a woman, one has to be in love with another."

"I did not know that that was a necessity," she said. "Is it? The two cleverest talkers known to me assuredly never loved anybody, except themselves. But good talk doesn't need cleverness. It depends on a wide general sympathy, don't you think?"

"Yes. Yes," he said eagerly. "Experts are the worst possible talkers. They ought only to be admitted like salt and pepper to what ought to be a dish of manna. And all the men one meets are experts. They have all the faults of experts. Each knows his job without knowing its philosophy."

Outside the door of the flat, Lionel tried to take his leave.

"You mustn't go till you've had some tea," she said. "Come in." She bent to the keyhole. "The lock is stiff, and my fingers are numb," she said. "Would you mind opening the door for me?" He was so near her, in the gloom of the landing, that the faint vague perfume, which always clung about her, moved him like her touch upon him. "Women ought not to be allowed to use scents," he thought, as he entered the hall. The

touch of her, as he took her cloak, in the gloom of the hall, humbled him. Something in the delicacy of the dress was pathetic. He thought he saw her point of view. For a moment her mere presence as woman showed him how much more she was.

In the glow of the cosy room, they had tea together. He was drawn to her. She was a very winsome winning woman. He was more at his ease sitting with her there. He felt that he was now her guest and that business and propaganda might be forgotten. The talk became quick and spirited. He made her laugh. Her eyes were full of fun when she was amused; they sparkled; all her face seemed to sparkle. Six o'clock struck.

"Good Lord," he said, starting. "I say. Why didn't you kick me out an hour ago?"

"But I've enjoyed my talk so much," she said. "I'm only sorry I can't ask you to stop to dinner. But I've got a little singing class coming here."

"It has been such a joy to me to talk to you," he said. "It's the first real talk I've had for more than a year."

"Come in always, when you're near here," she answered simply.

"Even if I am not to be your ally?"

"Yes. Come as salt or pepper." She gave her hand. Something in her shook him. He took her hand in both his. "I shall remember to-day," he said. "It is very wonderful to know you." She was touched. He was very winning when he was moved. Afterwards she felt pity for him. She had a pity on all lonely souls. This little soul was gracious as well as lonely. She, too, was lonely. The memory of his words, the physical memory of his touch, seemed to her to be, perhaps, evidence of a shy recognition of her loneliness, a reaching out to her spirit. Her thought of him that night was mixed with the wish that she might keep him out

of difficult paths, where his little lonely soul was straying, scratching itself on the brambles.

Lionel sat by the fire in the lonely chambers, wondering what the devil she meant by "coming as salt or pepper." It did not occur to him that he could be one of those who knew his work without knowing its philosophy.

CHAPTER V

THEY met a few days later. All four lunched together in Lionel's room. London was at its best that day. The sun shone. A cold blue sky sparkled aloft. A brisk wind, with a tang, gave the blood a fillip, yet failed to fling dust in the eyes. Who would not be alive on such a day? Life went roaring past almost gladly. The houses took on beauty. The river gleamed blue. The churches gleamed.

Atmospheric pressure influences life more than people think. We consist mainly of salt and water. Wet and the Sun play Old Harry with us. To Lionel, who was, perhaps, mainly salt, since he had a passion for the Sun, such a day was like a personal compliment. And the thought that that day would bring him his friends, and that Mrs. Drummond would give him her hand again, and that the grand campaign would begin, made him rise early to play Glück, while Mrs. Holder, in her print, lit the fire and dusted.

Often, on a good day, things conspire to flatter us. Pleasant letters come by the post. Friends are unexpectedly sympathetic. Good news comes. It is as though the individual became suddenly an important note in life's symphony, God's finger touches it so often. If we keep keen, as women do, with their bright, clear minds, a letter and a fine day will tax the soul's power of joy quite as surely as those strong drugs, love and war. All things conspired on this day to make Lionel joyous. The day, the prospect, and the post. He received a big mail.

Only those who have lived in exile, or in the loneliness

of a big town, can know the pleasure of letters. They add a grace to life not to be understood by the fully fed, or drugged. They are all that life has withheld, companionship, tenderness, unselfishness. One of Lionel's letters was from Miss Dora Plunket asking him to make a four, to dine that night at the Tuesday Club. Would he please wire if he could come. He telegraphed that he would be delighted. His loneliness was being lifted from him. He had now before him an entire day of companionship and lively personal interest. He turned to his piano after breakfast to wrestle with Schumann's "Carnival." It seemed for the moment to be less important that the campaign should be militant, than that all should be brothers together. He had not known such spirits for more than a year. The welcome of his friends was the crown of the morning's pleasure. They were glad to see him. Naldrett with his gay, quiet humour, Fawcett with his smile, and mild kind clever face, beaming behind glasses, Mrs. Drummond flushed with the day to a health which brightened the life near her. They lunched together there. Lunch went with a sparkle like the day. Mrs. Drummond's radiance was like wine upon them. It was one of her rarer days too. She was living in the depths of her gentle being. Life was thrilling in her. She was touched to such fineness, on so many sides of her, by the day's happy accidents, that something of her very spirit, a glow, a delicacy from her, made life a memorable thing for all who spoke with her. Woman is a choicer creature than man. Her delicate nerves when they are touched with the delight of life, are touched to the consideration of life itself, not, as with man, to the practice of the affairs of life. So, now the delight of Mrs. Drummond, brought to her by each sensitive nerve, alive in joy, grew in her heart as a love of all nobleness, with a perhaps not worded prayer that the

joy so given by the accident of life might not be communicated unless nobly. Woman has every noble power in perhaps more noble measure than man, who denies her permission to apply her power to the bettering of what he has bungled. From this denial it has come to pass that only the ignoble powers in woman have had complete scope in human affairs. Woman, forbidden to apply her power, has been forced either to trick and cheat, or to remain without power. The woman of our time has that old heritage, the ghosts of her ancestresses ranged against her in man's mind. She, whose life is pure fire, referring all things to the stern and splendid tests of fire, has to guard heart and lips among us, because a creature once went slinking, hectic with rouge, in the old gilded foyers of sentiment and sensuality.

After lunch, they sat round the fire to talk. Mrs. Drummond nearest to the blaze, with the glow on her cheek, Naldrett opposite to her, Fawcett next to her. Lionel sat between the two men, pushed a little back out of the circle. In his sudden flush of spirits he was thinking that he would be able to convert all these three to his own way of thinking. He felt his power over what is merely sentimental and idealistic. Incidentally he noted the flush and sparkle on Mrs. Drummond's face. He crossed over to her, while the others talked. Stooping to her, he asked if he might get her a screen. She refused it, with that smile of pleasure which made the pleasing her even in a little matter so wonderful. The question, trivial as it was, really pleased her deeply. She had seen Lionel at his best, throughout lunch. The little act of deference, or rather something spiritual in his voice at the moment, made her feel that they were not such spiritual strangers after all.

"Have you been hearing anything of our scheme,

Mrs. Drummond?" said Leslie Fawcett, picking his words till his glasses were correctly poised. "Has my cousin been telling you about it?"

"Yes," she said, "I've been discussing it with him."

"What do you think of it?" said Leslie. "I would like to know what you think of it. For in the last week we've been threatened with a defection."

"Do you mean Mr. Heseltine?" she asked, glancing at Lionel with a smile.

"No, I think my cousin's sound."

"What, has Roger gone back on us?" said Lionel. "Shoot the traitor. Drum him out."

"It's like this," said Naldrett. All looked at him. He stared straight in front of him into Mrs. Drummond's eyes. There was a moral defiance in his tone. His look was that of one shrewdly sensitive to the measure of his hearer's sympathies. "It's like this. You see. We went into this scheme, convinced that what the age wants is something to make life less hideous and less wasteful. We planned, I think, to start an organisation to teach men how to apply science to life. That was it, wasn't it, Lionel?"

"That was something like it," said Lionel. "Near enough for a poet. Go on, sir."

"I've been reading the papers about these Suffrage women," he said, "you know," he added, flushing as his emotions warmed, "those women are heroic. And men are treating them in a way which—well, there it is. Here are these ladies being absolutely heroic. I don't say their methods are always right. Sometimes I think they're ill-judged. But when you think of what a woman's life is in England, and how these women have been brought up, and what they face, and what they suffer, good Lord, one ought to kneel to them. A woman told me the other day that at one of their meetings in the Midlands, men rushed the platform,

and mobbed the women, and spat at them. It seems to me that all the evils in modern life spring directly from the absence of women in the government. They are just the evils that aren't in men's line of pain. Men die of phthisis and are buried. That's an end. But women are bearing children in squalor and the children are growing up in squalor, and there is no end. Only a growing, spreading, ghastly degradation of life, for men, who allow it, and for women and children who suffer from it. Lord God, there is no end." He was up on his feet, talking excitedly, glaring into any eyes he happened to catch at the moment. "I say that we ought to be helping women to their place in government, so that there may be an end. We've got together a little money, and we've got a little energy. Let's use them to get women the vote. Now I'm going to be personal. Look at Mrs. Drummond, there. Could you imagine a greater evil than that women like Mrs. Drummond can have less share in the government than the lout in the gin palace? I've been thinking things over. There's a greater need for women beside men, helping men, than for what we talked of in Ireland the other night." He sat down, feeling the fire ebb from his mind. He trembled a little. He glanced from face to face wondering if he had made a fool of himself. Mrs. Drummond was smiling. She was pleased. Lionel vaguely glancing from face to face, was trying to see how far underneath his chair one long lean foot, in a hide slipper and a cabin-knitted sock, could be forced, without fracture of the bone; Leslie, who had taken off his glasses in order to rub his fingers along the spring, was now peering up at the Correggio through them. He looked unnatural, like a barrister in court expecting a voice from heaven. He was the first to speak. "Yes," he said. "It's a question which ought to be discussed. The question is how far it would

be possible, I mean how far the women themselves—setting aside the rights of their case. And then. Bettering the world is all very well, but aren't politics rather a broadening of our plan? It's a question, isn't it, how far it will be wise to mix what is, or ought to be, purely theoretic, or, if you like, didactic, with the militant and reformatory? A laboratory, which would give advanced scientific experimentalists the means of research, and a paper which would enable them to state their views, would be more likely really to fulfil a national want, than——” He hesitated. “I mean,” he went on, “setting aside the question of right and wrong, let us consider what we are most competent to carry out.” He looked at Naldrett and at Mrs. Drummond. He thrust back his chair a couple of feet. “What do you think about it, Lionel?” he asked. Lionel looked at Mrs. Drummond as though expecting her to speak. He smiled at her. “Mrs. Drummond,” he said, “I see you're going to win. As for you, Roger, you're a base betrayer. Let's hear some more schemes. I don't much mind what I do to help the world, as long as it's something vigorous. But you people jump from science to politics, as though you would never tackle anything. You've heard Roger. Now hear Mrs. Drummond. She is for strengthening Public Health authorities and putting an end to charity.”

“Charity is the last,” said Naldrett. “The death-bed sensuality.”

“It blesses him that gives,” said Lionel, “and enables him that takes to take more. Generally in a dark lane, when you're alone.”

“I belong to the movement for strengthening the Public Health authorities,” Mrs. Drummond said. “I thought, from what I heard that you were aiming at something very like that. As you were saying, Mr. Heseltine, we want a Public Health authority with as

much power to prevent disease as a man-of-war captain has to prevent mutiny. I hoped that if you were going to work on those lines you would let my friends know, so that there should be no overlapping."

"Whatever we do," said Lionel, "whatever anybody does, he must first upset something fat and sleepy which has had its use. That's a natural law. Things are in a mess. Leslie thinks they can be improved by pointing out the way. You think they can be improved by giving women the vote. Mrs. Drummond thinks they can be improved by the reform of the Poor Law. I'm not going to waste my strength trying to convert three enthusiasts, for all enthusiasm is perfectly right, as far as it goes. If my life would give women the vote or reform the Poor Law I'd give it. Would I? Wait a minute. Would I? No. I doubt if I would. I'd want to see what Mrs. Drummond would do. Well. Any way. Where was I? About things being in a mess. What's wanted is some jolly big reform. It's not giving women the vote. It's not reforming the Poor Law. What the State wants is complete control of the life within it, in the interests of humanity. Nobody cares a twopenny rush for humanity except the scientist. The landlord doesn't. Look at him. He's the choicest incompetent we breed. The soldier doesn't. He only wants a war and conscription. The sailor doesn't. What does the sailor want? A wife in every port and rum out of bond. The parson doesn't. He wants mankind in bearing reins. The lawyer doesn't. Law is like morphia. It makes one forget that its use is to lessen suffering. The merchant doesn't. He's out for profits. The member of Parliament doesn't. He's absorbed in his party. The peer of the realm doesn't. Peers are made incapable of wisdom by their breeding and their interbreeding.

"It's time the farce stopped. What we four ought

to do is to stop it. Come on. Let's stop it. Let's shoot the whole jolly lot, and put the scientist there. The man who really cares about life. Then you'll get all your reforms, not one alone. What do you say?"

"You think that what you propose is practical, Lionel?" Leslie asked.

"Practical? Of course it is. It would make earth paradise. Practicable, I don't say. I don't see man welcoming paradise in the shape I'd bring it. Resist? He'll resist like an army mule. Man resists medicine from the time he's two. But if a man has strength enough to conceive a possible political good, he is strong enough to enforce it on his fellows."

"How?" said Naldrett, "How would you enforce a scheme like this?"

"How is anything enforced?" Lionel asked. "People once fought for ideas. Now they fight for catch-words, reason being scarcer, and enthusiasm easier to rouse. I would bring this about by creating an enthusiasm. And every way of rousing enthusiasm is legitimate to a man in earnest, working for the good of the race."

Leslie laughed a little, gently. He was examining his glasses carefully, as though they were Lionel's proposition. "My dear Lionel," he said. He replaced his glasses on his nose. "And how," he asked, "do you propose to upset all this fabric? Without civil war?" He looked liker a judge than ever. Lionel twisted in his chair to face him.

"First," he said, "I call Mrs. Drummond to witness that this is no longer a fabric. It was one, but that was long ago. There are a few men trying to make it a new one in accordance with new ideas. There are a few more trying to varnish up the wreck from without, so that they may scoop a little more from inside before the cracks are noticed. As for fabric? No. There's

a powder magazine. And there's a good deal of flint, and a little steel, all lying handy. You think there'd be a row if we tried this?"

"Yes. The country's full of idleness and empty of thought."

"Leslie. I believe that in five years' time we could bring this thing through without a row. When I say a row I mean actual physical revolution. The whole trend of modern life has been to create a society so utterly without healthy outlets, that it's at the mercy of the first man who gives its hysteria direction. All the intelligence is in the cities. All the cities respond like fire to a little blowing. I believe that rightly worked, the hysteria of modern cities might be made the greatest revolutionary force the world has ever seen. You've seen it badly worked, to bad ends, yourself. You've seen it used to make the war. What was done there? A few ruffians bought a news agency, and used the press as a bellows. Result. The war. England disgraced. Social Reform hung up for a decade. With every prospect of nemesis in the near future. Mrs. Drummond, I know you think I'm unscrupulous. I'm not. I see the whole party with ideas splitting up into a lot of little Dorcas groups, and mothers' meetings. I want to unite all the little groups into one big party with a grand, constructive policy which will settle all the little points as a matter of course in settling the big one. I want you all to join me."

"Will you use, as you call it, the press as a bellows?" Mrs. Drummond asked.

"Yes," he said. "Certainly."

"I think you're so frightfully wrong," she said. "People who fan up agitation in the press either work in the dark, not knowing what they are doing, or work cynically, without regard for what they're doing. The

press is a dreadful power, and the way it works is always obscure. And—" She stopped, wondering if she might say all that she wished. "Really, Mr. Heseltine," she said, "what you call the hysteria of modern cities is a very awful thing. It is not a creative thing. It is something quite ignoble and destructive. You want to fan it up to destroy existing laws, so that you may crush it out under laws ten times as rigorous. Isn't that what your scheme amounts to?" She was smiling.

"Something like that. But give me credit for a little tenderness in the handling. And one never realises all one's dream. This isn't Utopia. What do you think, Leslie?"

"I think that what you want might look very pretty in a book," said Leslie. "But politics have nothing to do with welfare, Lion. Liberal politics deal with the control of certain interests. Tory politics with their promotion. That is about all they attempt. I don't even see that what you urge would be a good thing. The stamping out of disease might, for all we know, be a very fatal thing. We don't know what disease is. That, of course, is begging the question. Your real weakness is this. You aim at establishing a very real tyranny in order to establish a very doubtful good. And you forget that your electorate consists of the healthy. It is one of the signs of health, that it is unable to imagine disease. We are a pretty healthy race. That is why we imagine forms of health; dull forms if you like, profits, interests, and the rest of it. And that is why we can't imagine a sane system of dealing with destitution. We eat too much. Do you suppose that you'll get an electorate interested in bacillicides and the care of teething babies? Those are side-shows. The circus consists of dinner, purse, to some extent wife ("women's sphere is the home"), and the injustice, more or less bloody, which wins

applause at the moment. Whatsoever is more than these cometh (people say) of Socialism. You'll get severely jumped on. And if you persist, I'm afraid you'll make such a big scandal that you may put back really great, imperative reforms for a number of years. That is what I'm afraid you haven't weighed."

"You won't join me in this? Not even if I assure you that I mean to go into it earnestly and scrupulously?"

"No. It's wrong. It's founded on a misconception. I won't join you. Get your reform by enlightenment. I'd join you in that. Wouldn't you, Mrs. Drummond? A campaign to teach cleanliness and godliness. But you're so dangerous when you get an idea. Every idea you get is a declaration of war with the rest of the world. We must keep to our original plan."

"And you, Roger? Roger my last hope."

"It's no good," said Roger. "Or rather it is very good. But isn't it the sort of thing which you'll get gradually without working, by introducing other lesser, more pressing things. If you got women the vote. I'm supposing now that you're omnipotent. You're not, but you make a superb imitation. If you got women the vote, it seems to me that politics would become, at once, much more concerned with 'welfare,' while the 'interests' would tend to get shelved. It's hard to say, though. Outside our own little band, where the women are so splendid, there's a great multitude of reactionaries. The ordinary English lady is every bit as narrow as her husband. She's nicer to look at, and has better manners, but I think an Irish laundry-maid has wider sympathies. Still, it is the best kind, our kind, who would use the power. And they are far finer than men. They're something men can't approach on any plane. And politics will have more of a soul in them when women of that kind are engaged

in them. And when that happens life will seem so much fuller to most people that they'll come to your point of view naturally. No big reform like this can come at once, without a Napoleon. And you're not a Napoleon, even in your looking-glass. I say this. Move heaven and earth to get a more practical legislative assembly. "

"The trouble with this age," said Lionel, "is that its men are too fond of two things, business and pleasure. It has left thought to women. Women can't think; but they sugar the brains of every man who can. Ask any thinker of this generation who his disciples are. All women. And as a result, thought now is purely feminine. In many ways it's a good thing. Civilisation's getting to be a very fine thing, and it is demanding finer measures. But below the civilisation (and I suppose there are not more than thirty thousand civilised people now in Europe), there is a rabble which is getting to be a very terrible thing. And it's the humanity of that rabble which concerns me. There is no alternative platform. Women ought to have the vote. I know that. Women ought to have had the vote when Queen Victoria came to the throne. Destitution ought to be stopped. I know that. Destitution ought to have been stopped fifty years ago. Both reforms are necessary. They're very beautiful. They're very fine. But they're the reforms of a society whose thought has become feminine. And I quarrel with them because the methods of your thirty thousand are not the methods of this world. I stick to my own scheme."

"Might we discuss your methods in detail?" Mrs. Drummond asked. She felt that the situation was getting strained. Leslie glanced at Lionel with some anxiety. Lionel gloomed at Mrs. Drummond, and then stared despondently at the fire. "Methods," he

said, not without a shade of irritation. "I don't believe methods matter as long as you're in earnest."

"You don't believe that, really," she said, feeling vexed and sorry at the same time. "Men love truth exactly as they love women. The method is everything."

He looked at her. He was touched by her gentleness.

"It's not a case of love," he said. "I see a dunghill in the street, and I believe that at the bottom of it there may be some building material. When I get to the building material, I'll act like a builder. Till then, I'll brandish any muck-rake that's got good teeth."

Leslie rose to his feet, laughing a little. "My dear Lion," he said. He rested his fingers on the mantel and stared up at the Correggio. He touched the glass with a delicate finger tip. "It seems to me to be bloomed a little," he said. "I don't know, though. Ha. Yes. It is. It wants a touch. You ought to send it to Bondini's in Suffolk Street."

"We aren't getting on very fast," said Roger.

"We're split on the rocks we came to blast, it seems to me," said Lionel. "Well. Well. Let's have some tea. You'll have some tea, Mrs. Drummond? Ring the bell, Roger, and let's have some tea. Let's destroy our nerves if we can't destroy anything else."

During tea, Leslie tried to make a way for reconciliation.

"We've made a rather grave mistake," he said, "to come to this discussion so soon after our first talk. In a first talk, one takes too rosy a view. Then, after a few days, one takes too black a view. And then, after a few days more, one comes to something logical in between. Let's wait a few days and meet again."

"Oh, Leslie," said Lionel, "I can't go into it all again. I've shoved my silly soul on to the hearthrug there, and you've all said it was aniline dyed. It's done with. We can't work together. I didn't think we

could when we talked of it in Ireland. I don't know, though. I'm a tactless ass. You don't take sugar, Mrs. Drummond? No sugar? Will you have some lemon? You can always tell people with intellect. They all drink China tea, generally without sugar. Roger was an exception; he drank nothing but absinthe; but then he was one of these literary men. Do you belong to the Tuesday Club, Roger?"

"No," said Roger. "That's an absinthey gang. Are you joining?"

"No. I've got to dine there to-night. And I was wondering what sort the members are."

"I used to go there, sometimes. They're still in the late nineties. They're very feverish, and rather scented. They're rather in a backwash, if you know what I mean, and they don't quite know it, because twelve or thirteen years ago they were in the mid-stream. They're quite decayed. They were merely sensualists, and the sensualist, grown old, is a sentimentalist inclined to Rome and barley water. They had all the lusts, even the lust for cruelty, for blood. You remember how they lusted for blood. They've got no lusts, now, only nerves. Some of them have quite nice taste. But they belong to the decade of the short story, which is a Latin thing, a sort of whet like an olive or an anchovy. We belong to the decade of the drama, which is an English thing, and lasts till midnight. You won't like the Tuesday Club. Have you noticed, Mrs. Drummond, how literature has changed since Meredith became popular? The old ideal was this or that, but it was without a spirit. It had body and senses, and sometimes a mind; but not a spirit. Meredith has left us all in a hopeless passion for the spirit. Authors used to love their heroines for their beauty. Now they love them for the something beyond. There are no women, now, Only Beatrices."

"Some more tea, Mrs. Drummond?" said Lionel. Under his breath, he growled out something derisive about a sentimental ass. He poured the tea, wondering how long Naldrett would remain single. Or would he become a woman's friend? So many clever young men become women's friends. Generally in these friendships the women are much older than the men. Intimacy of any kind has a beautiful side. But an intimacy of this kind can only be very beautiful between genuine people. Otherwise, it is a half measure, sentimental on the one side, selfish on the other, a kind of limbo, liable always to become hell, when something real occurs to either participant. Naldrett was of too passionate a type to become a woman's last pathetic hold on her failing charm. Lionel wondered if the young man would fall at Mrs. Drummond's feet. He seemed to be impressed by her. It might be a good thing for him. She would probably marry him off to some nice clever woman of thirty-five, with glasses, and a good French accent. Somehow the thought made him a little jealous of Roger. Roger would never want an asylum for his affections. With his usual generosity in intellectual things he began to interest Mrs. Drummond in Roger.

"Roger," he said, "I forgot to tell you, I've been reading your play, I think it's very fine. Have you read it, Mrs. Drummond?"

"No," she said, "is this Mr. Naldrett's *Egyptian King*?"

"Yes. You must read it. As a rule I think romance is the most dangerous of all the spiritual temptations, because it's so false, and so beautiful; but you've done this so cleverly, Roger, that one feels something universal behind the beauty. There's only one thing which I don't quite see. What is your symbol of the moon-rise? I felt that you hadn't quite worked that out."

Roger was very pleased at all this praise. He blushed and smiled and looked at his boots.

"Oh, the moon-rise," he said. "It was to mark the beginning of the influence of the merely watery imagination, which is governed by the moon. You see my four characters are the four elements in the mind, and they are all represented externally, if you'll remember, by external symbols."

Leslie came sauntering back from the window with his cup. "Is this the *Egyptian King*?" he asked. "I think it's very beautiful, Roger. But why do you put your picture so far back? I think that what I feel about it is that Egypt is a little remote."

"Remote," said Lionel. "Remote be shot. Life is what it was four thousand years ago. Think a little. Nothing has happened since Rome, except the Shrapnel Shell. Where did I put my copy? Here it is. You must take it with you and read it, Mrs. Drummond. You'll like it."

"Thank you," she said, glancing curiously at the cover. "I shall read it to-night. Now I must be going." She stood up, and shook hands with the two men. Roger looked at her wistfully, hoping that she would give him some chance of seeing her again.

"Perhaps you will come and see me?" she said. She turned quickly to Leslie. "And do you think Mrs. Fawcett would come to see me?" The men thanked her. Leslie feared that he might not have the chance. He would not be in town for more than three days.

Outside, in the hall, Lionel helped her with her wraps. He was silent, and she was shy; but her shyness made him feel that what she was afraid to say was kind. He was afraid that she would go without speaking. The thought gave his face a look of sadness which nerved her. He moved to the door to open it. "Let me see

you to the station," he pleaded. "I'd rather you did not," she answered.

"Well. If you'd rather I didn't, I won't," he said. "Seeing people off is just like prayers for the dead."

She smiled a little. She had only a second more. "Mr. Heseltine," she said, bending to him, and speaking with nervous hurry. "Let me beg you not to start your campaign. At least not as you said. Don't spoil a great cause by doing something which isn't quite the finest thing. It would be just like a poet taking to vice of some kind. It would degrade thought unspeakably for perhaps a generation. Won't you think better of it? Come and talk to me, if I can help? I feel that you're being a little defiant, aren't you, because life is hurting in some other way? I shall be in to-night, or to-morrow night, if you would come to see me. Could you?"

"I'll come one night soon, if I may," he said. "You make me feel rather a brute." He hesitated for a moment. "I wonder if women are right," he said slowly. "Do you think they are, Mrs. Drummond?" He held her hand for an instant. "Good-bye," he said quietly. "Good-bye." She lowered her eyes. Her mouth quivered. She went out hurriedly. Lionel held the door open till he heard her on the ground-floor landing. "I wonder," he kept saying in his mind, "I wonder." Through a window on the stairs without he saw her pass out of sight under the archway. He went back moodily to his friends. "Roger," he said, "you're a literary man. Tell me about Drummond."

"Drummond?" said Roger, puzzled. "Do you mean St. Clare Drummond? The sort of poet."

"Yes."

"He'd nothing to do with this Mrs. Drummond, had he?"

"She was his wife."

"This woman? Married to Drummond?"

"Yes."

"Man, why didn't you tell me? I say, you have let me in."

"How?"

"Drummond was kicked out of the Tuesday Club; Symes, the Egyptologist, kicked him out, publicly."

"Good Lord," said Lionel. The three men looked at each other. Leslie, who didn't know the story, expected more. Lionel watched Roger's face with a scrutiny which Roger tried to explain, but could not.

"So Drummond was a scoundrel? Eh!" said Leslie.

"What a beautiful person she is," said Roger. Lionel sat down gloomily in his armchair.

"I suppose women are right," said Lionel. "But it's a point you've got to prove before you can live by it. Look here, you fellows. I've got to dress. I'm dining early at the other end of London. Wait for me, and we'll go along together." He hurried off into his room.

CHAPTER VI

THE dining-room of the Tuesday Club was never very full. There were less than twenty diners present when the Plunket party came to their table. Most of those there were dining in couples. A long-haired, sour-looking youth with the white face of vice sat alone at one table. His face had all the pettiness of the beautiful spoiled darling, who has grown up to be neither darling nor beautiful. He was waiting for some one, with growing irritation. He gave to Dora and Rhoda, as they entered, that look of fleshly appraisal which should entitle a woman to shoot a man. Lionel summed him up medically and spiritually in one glance. He turned to Dora with some chaff about her Mendelism. He managed at the same time to get a view of Staunton, the other man of the party, a barrister, with fine eyes, and a jovial manner. "In love with Dora," Lionel decided. "And melancholy to the bone, behind that mask." In an old mirror to his right, he saw the white-faced youth still staring at Rhoda. He turned to Dora.

"Miss Plunket," he said. "I feel rather a draught at this table. I'm a frightfully chilly person. Would you mind if we all went over to the table in the corner there?"

"No, I'd love it," she said. "Come along, Rhoda. We're going over there." They took their seats out of sight of the young man. "I'm sorry to be such a fusser," Lionel said, "but I'm only just out of the sun."

"I'm glad you mentioned it," said Dora. "Besides, it takes us out of sight of Rennet."

"Who is Rennet?"

"His real name is Mr. Gavin. I call him Rennet because he makes me curdle."

"Is that the young man sitting alone?" said Staunton. "He is very like Archie Strangeways. You know Archie, don't you, Miss Derrick? He wrote a book of verse called *The Kiss of Passion*. Most romantic. Really he's a most blameless person, who lives. Yes. I believe he lives on rennet. Like this scientist. You'll know his name, Mr. Heseltine. A Russian. Mechnikov. Some theory about sour milk. Doesn't he live on sour milk? Or is it the Tartars? No. The Tartars drink mare's milk. What was that book, Dora, about a man who drank mare's milk? I remember now. It's in one of Kingsley's novels. A horrible book about illiterate strong men who are very good at Christianity. They used to give it to me as a child. Did you have Kingsley as a child, Miss Derrick? But I expect you were very good. I don't suppose you were ever very Erastian, were you, or Puseyite? Kingsley's always down upon people who are Erastians. Or is it some other sect? Are you an Erastian, Mr. Heseltine? If I were a heretic I should be a heretic of the Uncreated Light. You get suddenly luminous just at the saraband, I should say the cummerbund. It must be most impressive. Besides being so good for dyspepsia. There is a new cure, isn't there, for dyspepsia? Did you see about it in the paper, Miss Derrick? Something to do with sand and running thirty miles. You know about it, I expect, Mr. Heseltine. Do you run on the sand, or do you take it in a little milk like—what is that stuff one has to take in milk? I shall think of it in a minute? You know, Dora? It's gone out of my head. Not phenacetin. Not radium. The other thing. What is it one takes in milk, Mr. Heseltine?"

"Typhoid germs?"

"Oh, that's very arch of you. No. Not those.

Though I believe you can take those, can't you? Or is that a lie of the brewers? One never knows what to believe. I was lunching to-day with Laurence Mennell. He's engaged to that red-haired girl. What was her name now? You know her, Dora. A red-haired girl who was at the Slade? Penkridge. Millicent Penkridge. They call her St. Pancras. What was I going to say about Mennell? Oh, about Belief. He was talking to a policeman in South Kensington Museum, and the policeman said he only believed in two books, the Bible and *The Rights of Man*. For 'there,' he said, 'you've got English History.' Wasn't that British? I wonder what he meant. Has anybody ever read *The Rights of Man*? People says it's so awfully good."

"I thought man had no rights," said Lionel, glancing at Dora.

"Oh," said Staunton, "if it comes to that, of course he hasn't. Rights are legal fictions. No one, really, has any right to anything, except, I believe, to the air on the beach below high-water mark. That is free. At least, I don't suppose it is free really, because there are all sorts of manorial rights. You might run up against them. Otherwise you have a right to it."

"But surely," said Dora, "one has a right to one's own property?"

"I don't believe you have, really," said Staunton. "But nobody really knows about these things except old Mr. Justice Baronhouse. Do you know him, by any chance? A perfectly charming man to talk to, but they say he drinks like a fish, like everybody else in these days. I believe he could tell you; but then he knows so much, he doesn't really know anything. For like all very good lawyers, he knows such excellent reasons against all he knows that his life is really a burden to him. They say his wife helps him. It must be a wearing sort of life for her. Have you been to see

the *Troubles of Tatham* at the Regalia, Miss Derrick? You really should. Oh, you ought to go. You can't really say that you know life till you've seen the *Troubles of Tatham*. You've been, Dora? Oh, haven't you? Shall we all go to-night? I don't suppose we should get in, though. It's about a man in smart society. You'd really be surprised."

Rhoda Derrick was wearing a black satin gown, severe, but costly. She was vivid-looking rather than beautiful; but in London, where beauty, of a kind, is common enough, vividness is scarce. A woman with the gift of colour must "tone herself down," lest she become conspicuous. Rhoda had very quiet, refined manners, and a subtly-careful carriage of head and limbs, thought out, to the most minute particular, in months of study before a pier glass. She wore only one jewel, a necklet of gold, slim and fine, which, by its delicacy, attracted the eye to the grace of her throat. This throat was, indeed, remarkable. It was the only part of her which had what might be called intellectual beauty. The rest was all colour and animal grace reduced to the terms of lady. Looking at her, with a good deal of admiration, for indeed her colour and glow were triumphant in their way, Lionel decided that her mouth was humorous, and her manner attractive. He wondered a little, at first, why she should trouble to be so nice to him. Towards the age of twenty, men discover that women who are nice to them are not necessarily in love with them, but anxious (it may be) to attain an end. The end in this case was not apparent. He could not see what she wanted. In the end he put down her niceness partly to the fact that she was radiantly well, and partly to the probability that Dora had designs on Staunton, which could not be prosecuted if people interrupted. He found the situation very agreeable, in spite of the fact, which became more

obvious at each moment, that he was being used as a stalking-horse. Miss Derrick had evidently determined that the man who "helped" in this way should be well rewarded.

A girl has only her instinct to teach her what effects she produces in the mind of man. Usually, it guides her truly; but there are moments, generally during music in the evening, in false lights, in emotional situations, when the animal spirits, or mere sentiment, a baser thing, will blind the guide, or urge the rejection of her counsels. People who observe character superficially, for the resolution of one curiosity, medical, mercantile, or what not, are often betrayed by the narrowness of their vision, which neglects passion or interest in its partial view. Miss Derrick had more than one excuse for her failure to realise the possible effect of so much effort to charm.

Lionel was one of those men of whom it is difficult to think in some human relations. The women of the circles in which he moved were puzzled by him. He was not what they had been brought up to consider as a marriageable article. As his aunt, Mrs. Strine, described the matter to her cousin Mrs. Hobart, he was "not like a man at all. One could never tell what form his selfishness would take." Rhoda Derrick was a gentler, shyer person than most of the women of her set. She found him an agreeable change, with a rather winning way.

When they rose to leave the dining-room, the men looked at each other, wondering if they were to be left to smoke there. "Come along with us," said Dora. "You can smoke all over the house in this place. Have you got anything to smoke?" She called with easy confidence to a waiter, to bring coffee and cigarettes to the library. Lionel opened the door. The three went out, Staunton close beside Dora, talking hard.

"How splendid," he was saying. "How splendid of you. It is like that thing in the poem. What was that poem, Dora? It was in *Lear* or perhaps in *Praed*. D'you know *Praed*? They say so many jinglers are like *Praed*. But people are such asses. *Praed*, I think, is most awfully good. That thing about the Fisherman. But perhaps you haven't read him. Have you?"

When properly wound up, "stirred by a painted beauty to his verse," Staunton went for quite a long time. Rhoda followed discreetly, wondering in her handsome little head, what soap Mr. Staunton used to make his neck shine so. There was a gloss on it. She hummed a couple of bars, and turned to await Lionel.

"Mr. Heseltine," she said, taking a step or two towards him, "would you mind? I think I left my handkerchief."

Lionel hurried back to the room. Rennet was talking with a lady whose dress had baggy blue bulges at the shoulders. She was a pretty lady, probably greedy. A waiter was bringing her a green liqueur. At another table a man with a drawl was talking art to another man. The women of the party hung on his lips. "Of course he doesn't really know," the drawl was saying. "He hasn't really got taste. He's got a flair, not taste. None of his set has any real taste. They buy Charles Pollocks, and Hendersons, and things like Miss Izod's." It was a kind of talk which always irritated Lionel. He looked at the man, so as to have his type. He was a well-fed, thick-lipped man with something in his face which would have been loud had it not been sinister. The women were of the common type of rich, pretty danglers upon the charlatans of art. They wore the dresses proper to the business, and talked about Life and Sincerity. The missing handkerchief was under the table.

Lionel found Rhoda vacantly waiting in the passage.

"Thank you," she said, smiling on him.

"What scent do you use?" he asked.

"One I make myself," she answered. "Do you like it?"

"Yes. I don't generally like scents, but I like this one. It's so subtle. Will you teach me how to make it?"

"What do you want with scents?" she asked. She paused to peep into a room. A murmur of voices came from within as she opened the door. Lionel noted that it was a dim room, lit apparently by one lamp. Rhoda hurriedly backed out, with a pretence of being shocked.

"Engaged," she whispered. "Never mind. We'll find a place somewhere upstairs. Unless," she added, "unless you'd like to join Dora in the library."

"She would rather I didn't?" he asked bluntly.

"That rather depends, doesn't it," she said, glancing up at him shyly, "on whether all men are as quick at guessing?"

"I hope they'll not be disturbed," he said. "I'll stand guard at the door if you like."

They went on together. They passed one or two doors. Music floated down to them from the studio. Couples passed them. Cards were going on in one room. Rhoda led the way into a sitting-room, a small room, almost divided into two by a heavy screen containing Goya's "Tauromachia" and "Guerra." A good fire burned there. On the settee, in one of the corners, a handsome couple languidly stirred coffee, while they puffed cigarettes, and asked each other questions. Such languors, coupled with such physical beauty, argued a blood-relationship.

"We'll come in here," said Miss Derrick, brightly. She touched a bell. "You'll have coffee, won't you?" she said. "Two coffees, please. A liqueur for you?"

No liqueur? No liqueur then, thanks." She settled into her cushions with an obvious pleasure in their warmth and softness. "This is a jolly room, isn't it?" she said. "No thanks. Not another cushion. Four is only self-indulgence. Five is advertisement. Is that chair all right?"

"Very nice, thanks," said Lionel. Coffee came. He noticed that she heaped the sugar in her cup. "Pretty creature," he thought. It occurred to him that some women, being mere dessert, need sugar. He would tell Naldrett so, and Naldrett would be immensely impressed. He would write a play about it. No. He would not tell Naldrett. He was vexed with Naldrett. Naldrett was going off to wallow again in his good old sentimental sloughs. He was vexed with Leslie, too. Leslie had set Naldrett back in the sloughs, just when he, Lionel, had pulled him out of them. And Mrs. Drummond was right, no doubt, and the spirit ought to be considered: but any way, he couldn't think about it now, his head was tired. He wanted to forget the whole business.

"You look depressed," said Miss Derrick. "You mustn't. You know, you may smoke in here."

"Will you smoke?" he asked.

"Thank you," she said. "I should like one, if yours aren't too strong." She lit a cigarette, bending over his hand. She lit it with difficulty, holding the cigarette to her mouth, woman-fashion. The act gave him a strong impression of the formation of her nose and of the gradations of her vivid colour.

"You are ill, Mr. Heseltine," she said. "I shall prescribe for you. You must come with Dora and me to golf next week. We go to a simply wonderful place; but I shan't tell you where it is, till you say you'll come. It'll be a certain cure."

"I thought medicine was nasty," he said.

"Smart people never take medicine nowadays," she answered. "It is most old-fashioned. We take treatment. Only people who take parish relief have medicine. It is most parochial."

"Yes," he said, sighing, "that's the tragedy. Are you interested in parish relief?"

"Do I look as if I were?" she asked.

"Why. Yes," he answered, smiling. "You look so prosperous that one would think you were receiving it. You look as though you'd been receiving it for a long time, long enough to know all the ropes."

"I suppose there are a great many frauds," she said. "One always hears so. Are you interested in parish relief?"

"In a way," he said. "I'm interested in all rather rotten things. I'm so fond of doctoring. The medical side of it's amusing. I'd like to have the reforming of it. You would think that national health is as important and as well worth spending money on as sea-power."

"And is this why you look so sad?" she asked.

"Do I look sad?" he said. "I don't feel sad. I was worried about this business, because some friends of mine wouldn't join me in an attempt to set it right. You see, one-eyed men think that all the two-eyed see double. But tell me about your golf. Are you very good? And where is your famous place for it?"

"You haven't said you'll come yet?"

"Will you be there?"

"Yes. I said I should be there."

"And you'll let me carry your clubs?"

"Oh, the caddie will do that. We've got caddies. We aren't quite so unsophisticated."

"I wonder," said Lionel, "if it be still possible to amuse oneself in England without making somebody else servile."

"I think you're most unpleasant," said Miss Derrick. "I shan't tell you where our place is."

The languid couple on the other side of the screen rose languidly to their feet. The woman spoke in the noble contralto voice which goes with a certain noble type of English woman. There is a leisure and an ampleness in the tone of it. It is very rare, like all fine things. But a blind man could divine the noble presence from the sound of such a voice. It is perhaps the only kind of voice which has, in itself, aristocratic personality.

"It's very early, Hartry," the noble voice drawled. "They won't get to the Brahms before half-past. And I'm so tired of all these tinkly people. All the 'com-miserating sevenths.' What?"

"They say the 'cellist isn't bad," said Hartry.

"Optimism makes life hideous," she drawled. "Get a taxi, Hartry. I won't go in a horse-cab." For just an instant she was in sight of the other couple. She was a queenly woman, six feet high, noble in walk, look, and voice. She walked as though the world were dust to her. Being a fine person, she was justified. The pair passed out together, saying disparaging words of tinkly people, meaning, apparently, Grieg and Schubert.

"I feel a draught," said Miss Derrick, writhing her shoulders in cushions.

"They may have left the door open," said Lionel. "I say," he added, "they've left an opera-glass. Just excuse me, will you, while I give it to them." He found her on the stairs. She took him in in one glance, past, present, and future. White satin made her very queenly. The stuff smelt faintly of sandal wood. She thanked him. Coming back to Rhoda he shut the door.

"You're not vexed?" he asked. "I was beginning to be righteous. The beginning of righteousness is generally a quarrel with a woman. Or getting old. I

suppose, indirectly, that's the same thing. Do you ever quarrel?"

"I often want to."

"When do you want to?"

"I don't know. After reading novels. When women quarrel in novels the men always say, 'By Jove, you do look beautiful.' There must be something in it, don't you think?"

"Shall we try?"

"We'll try next week if you keep me waiting at the station."

"Will you let me carry your clubs?"

"Do you want to?"

"Of course I want to. Will you?"

"Why do you want to?"

"I want to be with you."

"Dora will be with me."

"And Mr. Staunton."

"What do you think of Mr. Staunton?"

"I can't think of anybody when you're in black satin."

"Do you like my gown?"

"Very much indeed. It's perfectly beautiful. You are like—"

"What am I like?"

"Like an ode of Keats."

"What are Keats?" They laughed.

"Might I see your necklace, Miss Derrick?"

"Oh, won't you call me Rhoda? Everybody calls me Rhoda."

"I would like to. May I?"

"Do."

"I like Rhoda. Rhoda. It's like a dahlia."

"Dahlia was her sister."

"So she was. You couldn't have been called Dahlia."

"Why not?"

"Dahlia is soft and mournful. And pale. With great eyes."

"Dahlia flaunts."

"That's Delilah. Dahlia droops."

"What nonsense we're talking."

"Our friendship's still childish."

"Send it to school."

"Do you take pupils?"

"If you'll carry my clubs." They were enjoying themselves. Her eyes were very bright. She was all bright, hair, eyes, skin, and teeth. She seemed to sparkle.

"And now will you show me your necklace?"

"Do you want me to take it off? Well. I will." She sat upright from her cushion and put her hands to her neck, with a movement full of grace, showing arms, hands, and neck in all their roundness and whiteness. She unclasped the gold, twirled it in her left palm with one coquetting finger and held it out to him. She was smiling at her roguery and at its effect upon him. Success, men being what they are, may be, and often is, mere confession of vulgarity. But to succeed by the brightness of the purely personal, unmixed with any taint of what is common to creation, is choice triumph, only enjoyed completely by women. Rhoda's triumph was all the sweeter from the niceness of his respension to her mood. She had a pleasant sensation, it was not a thought, few people think, that it was all a pleasant run of music which she would play over deliciously, from memory, when she went to bed. He took the gold frankly from her, and examined it.

"What lovely gold beads," he said. "Italian, of course?" She nodded. Her eyes danced. "Italian. I like it. Do you often wear it?"

"Sometimes."

"I shall waylay you." She smiled, idly stretching out her hand.

"What is the secret of the clasp? I can't fasten it."

She leaned forward slightly, watching his difficulty, smiling. "Won't you show it to me, Rhoda?"

"Since you call me that. Look." A finger with a little pink nail touched the delicate spring. The clip snapped to. "Do you see?"

"I see. But it looks nicer on you. Won't you put it on again?" She put it on.

"Have you many jewels, Rhoda?"

"No. Not jewels. I've got some amusing beads."

"Will you show them to me?"

"Would you like to see them?"

"I should like to see you."

"Well, if you see me often, you'll soon see them all."

"Will you be with the Plunkets long?"

"Yes. I've nowhere else to go, poor dear."

"Are you very unhappy?" She shook her head, smiling.

"Do I look it?" She was radiant.

"Can I be your looking-glass?"

"If it's windy next week. One's hair gets so untidy."

"Does it? It's hard to imagine your hair untidy. Isn't it very nice?"

"Isn't what very nice?"

"The consciousness of looking delightful?"

"Mr. Heseltine, you will really come next week. You haven't said you will yet."

"I would like to very much. You haven't been playing long?"

"Three months."

"How unselfish of you." She blushed.

"Don't be vexed," he said quickly. "I meant it. I was admiring you. And of course you don't care for golf. You like games. Golf is only a consolation for being born British."

She looked at him with interest. She had never

before met the perceiving man. She liked him for it; but it startled her. He was different. This was a new thing to her. How far would it go?

"It would be rather absurd to be vexed, don't you think?" she said. She paused. "I'm very fond of Dora," she added. "Besides," here she pricked him gently, "it wasn't always a threesome."

"Gooseberry—and—Fool," he said. She laughed a little.

"I shan't talk to you."

"Rhoda."

"No."

"Rhoda."

"Well?"

"You won't be on your guard against me."

"I haven't decided yet. You rather took my breath away. What do you think of Mr. Staunton?"

"From Miss Plunket's point of view?"

"She's too good for him."

"The woman always is. We're a poor lot. I don't look at the positive possibilities of marriage. I look at what the woman will be spared. . . ." Rhoda weighed this, pondering what it might mean.

"And if the man is better than the woman?" She put the case, wanting, not the answer, but his pleasure in being asked.

"I've thought of that, Rhoda. No. If the man is better than the woman, then he has the feminine quality. You must regard him as the woman. Does that fit your experience?"

"I don't quite like the idea, somehow," she said, making a tiny mouth. "But I think I see what you mean. Are men very bad as a rule?"

"Think how women are educated."

"Do you put it all on us?"

"No, Rhoda. I blame the idea of comfort. That

fear of being burned which keeps the loaf half-baked. Women make life too easy. They find that the wild boar is tamer in a trim sty Or I think that's it. They ought to drive him out. So that he can see the stars. That's sentiment. Or is it priggishness? Or is it merely fudge? Anyway, women spend all their energies on the home, instead of on the State. And the result is that they either make home so pleasant that the men won't think about the State, or so unpleasant that they go and get drunk or commit suicide."

"And so you would abolish the home?"

"I'd abolish loafing-places and pigstyes; about nine-tenths of existing homes. Quakers and Coastguards are the only people with homes. Rhoda, you and I are products of loafing-places. And you agree with me. I see rebel in every line of you, fighting against the consciousness of your black satin."

"It isn't my prettiest frock, so there."

"It must be one of your prettiest. And you are a rebel?"

"A woman has to be. Just a little tiny bit."

"Will you tell me what we do for lunch next week?"

"We bring a basket, and eat in the Club House. Hardly anybody's ever there, except on Saturdays and Sundays. So we have a room to ourselves. I'll bring lunch for you. What would you like?"

"Leave to walk with you."

"Wouldn't you like some rose leaves, and a few sighs?"

"Give me what I want first. Trimmings!"

The clock on the mantelpiece struck its little chime of sixteen notes, with a silver tone, plaintive but precise, telling the hour. Afterwards it chimed eight notes, for the half hour. The pair talked on there, in that forgotten room, heedless of the time, forgetting it. They were out of time for a brief while. They were shut away from the world, high up, in that dim room. The hang-

ings were so dark and still, the design on them was as ominous as blood. Outside, the wind murmured a little. Footfalls passed in the passage. The music had stopped. The fiddlers were out in the night, going home, fighting the wind at corners. It was getting late; it was night. The streets were still. Frost had fallen. There in the room the two talked. Life was quick in them, life who runs fast and soon withers, the grass life, the leaf life, beauty with the autumn, the gift, not the giver. They were not like people. Who would sit in that room, among those hangings, by firelight, so late, under all the cruelties of the ruthless master? They were like a thought in a brain, a thought for a picture, a haunting of De Vries become flesh. For perhaps all intense thought finds a body for itself, fleshly, if not intellectual. And perhaps these two, talking together, kindling a flame together, were thoughts of his, made real, in the old romantic house so steeped in his mind's colours.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the third quarter. Coals rustled in the fireplace. They fell from the grate with a faint metallic clink half smothered in ash. Rhoda started quickly up.

"It's nearly eleven," she said.

"Why didn't you tell me to go?" he asked.

"Oh, stay till twelve if you like. Only I must find out where Dora is. I hope she's got her latchkey."

"May I come?"

"Yes. Do." She looked at herself in the mirror, putting a touch or two to her hair. She shot a quick glance at him, smiling. "Hair's a bother," she said.

"It checks the unladylike," he answered. "Remember your weak sisters."

"There," she said, moving to the door. "Will you put out the light?" He did so. They were in a dark carpeted passage full of draughts. A little light

glimmered at the end. It seemed to filter up from somewhere below. A staircase was there.

"People don't come to these top rooms much," said Rhoda, "and there are not many here to-night. They've all gone to see the Brieux play. There's a hidden stair at the end, leading down to the gallery. It's behind some curtains. I expect we'll find them there." They passed the staircase from which the light glimmered. A few steps beyond, a slit of a window gave them a glimpse of roofs, streets, lit windows, a frosty star.

"Will you strike a light, Mr. Heseltine," she asked. He struck one. The door was behind the hangings. It hid a little narrow winding stair.

"Shall I go first?" he said. The match burned out. He stepped down. He lit another match. He saw her peering down at him. "Mind how you come," he cautioned. He heard her steps follow his; he heard the rustle of her dress.

From the dimness of the gallery, they looked down upon the studio. They saw Dora talking to a young man whose eye had that wild look which one sees in a few portraits by Hoppner. It is the Buck look, a look of animal spirits, dowered with sufficient physical equipment, nearly extinct here, frequent in young America. Staunton had apparently gone.

"We'll go down to her," said Rhoda.

They were alone in the gallery. They moved side by side to the stair which led past the silent room. He stepped into the silent room, and called to her. The drip of water plashed. A dimness, hardly light, came from the window. "Rhoda," he called. He could just see her pause at the door. "This is an uncanny place," he said. "I don't like De Vries. Where are you?"

"Here. Isn't it bogey? I've never been in here in the dark before."

"Well. You mustn't stay now. You've got nothing round your throat. I meet you Friday next week at five to ten? At Paddington?"

"Yes."

"And I may carry your clubs?"

"Yes. If you want to."

"Right." He paused. Something was white on a chair. He touched it. "Rhoda."

"Yes."

"Miss Plunket's been here. Here's her handkerchief. I would know the scent anywhere." He struck a match. The little scented scrap was brodered a big "D." "She's been sitting in the dark," he said.

"A very good place, too," said Rhoda. They went out smiling. Down in the studio Dora was smiling. Lionel helped the two girls into a cab. As he walked home, the image of Rhoda made him happy. She was a charming, vivid comrade who gave life a grace. Rhoda, in her room at the Plunket's, sat before the fire, brushing her hair, thinking. When she was in bed, she sat up, propped with pillows, while she went through it all in her mind. It was very delightful. The memory was full of little quick pleasant pangs; but still she was not happy. She was shivery; her feet were cold; the room seemed full of presences. Presently she slipped out of bed, and crept away, and tapped at Dora's bedroom door. Her friend was awake, too. She could not sleep. Rhoda nestled in beside her, and kissed her cheek. Her friend's hand pressed her shoulder for an instant. The firelight flickered on the ceiling, full of memories of lives before this life, cave-lives, camp-lives, lives in old turrets, dead lives. A near by church told them the time, hour and quarter hour. Neither girl slept much. They passed the night in each other's arms, not understanding very well, but frightened and a little ashamed. At breakfast the next

morning, as they drank tea, and broke toast, before rushing off, Mr. Plunket gave them his views on the qualified Radical fanatics who wanted to upset the Poor Law. By a little dexterous sympathy, Rhoda bought a few fresh facts to make into neat little dainty patties, which, a week later, had the desired effect on the manly palate.

Some weeks slipped past.

CHAPTER VII

THE day was so fine, and the view from the links, even in the haziness which comes, in the afternoon, with slight white frost, so lovely, that the players lingered late. It was after sunset when they left the tea-room of the club-house. The station was two miles away, and the last good train was due in forty-five minutes. They started off all four together, each couple bent, rather obviously, on letting the other get ahead.

"We'll race you," said Lionel, finding that Staunton could devise nothing.

"A race? How splendid. What shall we have on it?" said Staunton.

"Are you ready? Go," said Dora, callously. "Bother. My shoe's undone. Willy, you're good at knots. Do it up for me at once, so that it won't come undone again?"

"We shall beat you," Rhoda called, over her shoulder. She carried her head high. She stepped out bravely. Lionel's gait had never lost its military briskness. She kept step with him, level with his shoulder. She gave him the sense that she was marching with him. It was pleasant and comradely to have her there at his side. A march tune of his old regiment rang in his mind. It was an Irish tune, pretty well known on July 12th there. He remembered how he had marched to it on just such a night, years before. She was following his thought, rather cleverly. Perhaps she was merely prompted by the beat of their feet together. "Whistle a march," she said.

"You are the march," he answered, promptly.

"That is very nice," she said. "How bright the stars are."

"What do you know about the stars?"

"I like walking by them. They are like little knobs of thought in a great brain."

"Yes," he said, puzzled by this side of her. She was being happy by him. That possibility did not occur to him. "Don't you think that that's what we are?" he asked.

"In a sense," she said. "It makes one rather gasp though, doesn't it?"

"So does everything really felt," he answered.

"That is true, too," she said. "Your life has been very real, hasn't it, Mr. Heseltine?"

"It hasn't been soft," he answered. "As for real . . . no, Rhoda. I've not got to grips with it, yet."

"What do you call getting to grips with it?" she asked. "Old Sir Patrick was saying that you were the hardest working assistant he'd ever had." Sir Patrick's last words "and almost a genius," she withheld.

"Did he say that?" said Lionel. "Did he! Well. I like to know what people think. But that's bread and butter, Rhoda. That's not life. Bread and butter are two things which keep us from life. I want to know what it's all about. It's mostly very petty. All this gadding about, and frothing at the mouth, and meeting without mixing. And then there are a lot of wants, all of them pretty big and pretty ugly. And then there's the thing beyond. It's so hard for a scientist to say that there's anything beyond. Yet he ought to be shot if he says there isn't. I feel that there's something pretty big and intellectual beyond. Do you feel that?"

"I hope so. A woman can't help hoping so. I sometimes shudder at the thought of things touching me. The intimate little woman's me inside. But are you sure it isn't only yourself?"

"Even that 'makes one rather gasp.'"

"Yes. But what did you mean when you talked of getting to grips with life?"

"I meant getting rid of some of the rottenness which keeps us down. Nobody thinks much of life. Beer and games and death, and the means of spreading death, are reckoned important. But nobody thinks of life nor of its possibilities. And I'm worried that I've not got to grips with the facts which keep life down. Stamping out a disease is one thing. The child's bricks to the architect." He stopped and looked into Rhoda's face. He could only see it dimly. "Rhoda," he said, "why shouldn't one stamp out all the rottenness? It can be done. It all comes from what is fierce and false in us. Wants and greeds, upsetting what has got beyond them."

Though she did not really understand him, she felt that he was reaching out to her. She remembered his despondency some weeks before. His friends had not helped him. They were to have done something together in the way of social reform, and putting people in prison for catching cold. And he had been sad about it. And here he was coming to her about it, and what was she to say? How great a plague men can be is only known to women. But man might remember that woman can seldom be his saint without being a martyr to him at the same time. The fact might teach him if she were so cruel as to let him see it. Patiently she sits, extracting the little crumb of gold for him from the cart-loads of ore he dumps upon her. She is infinitely proud. She will never speak if man will not see. She may be understood, but never explained. And if wearying of the task, she become faint, and offer to share the work, she will so ask, that, unless his spirit beats with hers, he will think that she asks him to double it.

"Yes," she said, "it could be done." She rapidly translated the thought most likely to be in him. "Couldn't you do it? I don't know much about these

things. But you've stamped out a disease. And I heard you tell Dora that big things were explained by little. Couldn't you do this as you did the disease? We must go on though, or they'll catch us up. Tell me how you did the disease, as we walk along." They walked on.

"Sir Patrick did the ophthalmia," he said, "and my friend Naldrett did all that we did with sleeping sickness. The first thing to be known about a disease is its cause, then its influence on the body, and then, if possible, the means of destroying either the cause or the effect. You can either poison the germ, or train the body not to mind it. But on an immense scale like this, it's hard to see one's way."

"You'll have to poison the germ in this case here, won't you?"

"Poison's an ugly word, Rhoda."

"Germs are rather ugly, aren't they. Or so I understood."

"Ugly? No. I wouldn't call them ugly. They're just low. That's what I always say of human beings whom I don't like. They're not exactly ugly. They're just low."

"Well. How would you set about poisoning germs?"

"I would find something in which they couldn't live. Or I'd inject a less obnoxious breed which would make it impossible for them to live. Or I'd expose them to the sun."

"Couldn't you do anything of the sort here?" she asked. "I should have thought you could." He turned the three methods into terms of politics. They were all workable, on the body politic. But success by any of the three seemed a little barren. For a little instant, he felt that his friends would nullify all intellect for the petty part of it called style.

"What would you do, Rhoda?"

"I'm only a woman," she said. "A woman can't do much except ask the doer to tea."

"And wear black satin. And do her hair prettily."

"That's not very much, is it?"

"How do you know?" She blushed in the dimness and warmed to him.

"Are you very much troubled about this work, Mr. Heseltine?" she asked. "I think you said your friends wouldn't join you. Is that what is troubling you?"

"They won't. No. The trouble with most people is that they look on humanity as a class. Humanity isn't a class, it's a nuisance. It's the body full of poison which the poor little brain has to drag, and suffer from. Rhoda, I'm going to swear. No, I can't. You won't call me Lionel. You always call me Mr. Heseltine. I won't. Class is just a blinker which one puts on before entering politics. There's not a single seeing mind in either House. They're all blinkered. Tories, Liberals, and Labour. How are you going to get a vital measure through two Houses of that sort? I'm not going to try."

"But isn't that giving up?" she said. "I'm sure you could. A woman leads a sheltered life. It's hard for me to say how you could do this. But you've got ideas, and I just know you can carry them out. One can always do as much as one plans, though not quite so well. Look how everybody believes in you, Sir Patrick, Colin Maunsel, all the Hamlin set. You wouldn't give up just because your friends wouldn't help you, would you?"

"No, Rhoda. I don't know though," he answered gloomily. "Oh, I'm going to try. What worries me is not the thing itself, it's the way of tackling it. Class measures are half-measures. They're either selfish or sentimental. Reform comes from some one big enough to be neither while using both. There's only one way

of getting a reform, Rhoda. By making the alternative dangerous. I am worried now lest by doing what I want to do, in the only way which seems possible to me, I should be upsetting something which is rather fine."

"Wouldn't you be putting something fine in its place?"

"Yes, I should," he said. "People won't understand that the use of fruit is for seed, not for sweetness. All this talk about style is a sign that we're wrong. What good is style, when England contains half a million sots who can only know comfort in a gaol or in a workhouse? What sort of seed will they leave for humanity? Every fortieth person here is a loafer, a sot, or a pauper, or all three. What sort of England will their children make? What sort of song to praise God with?"

"It is dreadful," she said in a hushed voice. She felt that he was going to say more. All these merely "dreadful" things had been kept from her sheltered life. She was puzzled, and rather shocked by them. She didn't know what to say. She was puzzled by the remark about praising God. She thought that that was done in church.

"The fine thing is on the top of all that," he went on. "And it is fine. The best of our character, some of our women, some of our officials. But how much better it would be if it were growing out of something good, instead of out of what is. Rhoda, I don't think the really fine would consent to be, while this kind of thing goes on." He was excited now, having found a just excuse for the nullifying of his scruples. He had only to go on to the next step. "The fine has no right to be, on these conditions."

"Don't you think, though," she said, "that a tremendous lot is being done? And that what you call the fine is really necessary, to keep something alive, well, just the idea of woman, if you like. Isn't it rather

a fine thing that you and I can be walking here together in the dark? And if you do away with what makes this possible, don't you really destroy something fine merely in order to try to destroy something horrible? Wouldn't it be better to keep all that? Surely a soldier does keep all that? That is what a woman understands by the word soldier. He destroys whatever threatens her, while keeping her ideal always before him. Isn't that it?"

"Rhoda," he said, "if I were a soldier it would be child's play. That is, if I had skill enough and men enough. All the big reforms are made by soldiers. I could march down, put the Lords in the Tower and the Commons in the Thames, and then make hay while the sun shone, being a sort of Fairfax and Sidney all the time. But I can't do that. I've neither got the men nor the chance of getting them. I've got to fight with modern political weapons. They're not swords. They're newspapers. To get an army of soldiers one has to send round a press and impose a discipline. But to get an army of voters, or set a mob yelling for reform, one has to corrupt a press and fan up an hysteria. The question is simply this. 'What right has any one to abuse my methods, when I'm fighting a public danger with the only weapons allowed?' No one has a right, till he shows a better weapon and puts up a better battle."

"Colin Maunsel was saying that the press is election beer masquerading as medical comfort."

"I call it the plutocrat's halfpenny change for your money and your life."

Rhoda was looking straight ahead down the road, thinking. The men of her set as far as she had been allowed to see them, conformed to the standard of her set. They were not high standards, though, of course, she did not know this. They were founded on the

elementary and boyish standards of the cricket-field and the fourth form. She could not see any of the men known to her doing a mean or an unkind thing. Men in other circles might be guilty, or horrid, but not the men with whom she danced and dined. They were above that kind of thing. It simply wasn't done. And if those jolly, silly, empty boys were gentlemen, how much more so was this clever, delightful man at her side? She tried to think how some other men known to her would have approached the tussle. She had helped once to canvass for the husband of a friend, a Captain Chieveley, a Tariff Reformer, a very nice man, extremely good at bridge. Captain Chieveley had told her that the secret of electioneering was a house to house canvass, with the promise of cheaper beer, and stern insistence on the need of making the foreigner pay. All that she remembered of her lesson was that "£150,000,000 of goods came in to this country every year to rob the British workman." Some one had questioned that conclusion, a Mr. Piggott, a horrid man, whose father had been a grocer, which just showed you how much he could know about government, compared with Captain Chieveley, son of Chieveley, of Chieveley-Chieveley, the famous M.F.H., now, alas! slightly mental, which was so sad for his son.

That the standards of the schoolboy do not apply to intellects which are not boyish nor to passions which are not selfish, she had no means of knowing.

"Don't you think," she said, "that everything has to be put so that it will be easily understood? I know very little about politics, but when I was canvassing for a friend of mine I was told always to put the case so that they could see it. As far as I can see, you're worrying, aren't you, because you won't always be able to do things just as you would in a drawing-room? Of course you won't. They'll call you a liar. They'll

boo you. And then your men will boo the other *man*, and call *him* a liar. And then you send out gangs with tin trumpets to stop the other man's speech. It's great fun."

Lionel smiled a gloomy smile. "Yes," he said, "I suppose it's impossible to keep a dignity when once you begin dabbling in elections. Doesn't it make you weep, Rhoda, that an election should be our only means of choosing our governors? Would you choose a horse, or a dog, or a necklace, or a black satin dress by such a method? I wouldn't."

"I don't think it's such a bad test," she said. "Generally it's the nicest man who wins."

"I never knew a nice man yet who wasn't a fool," he said savagely. He paused on the point, and wiped off the poison for her with, "Nor a clever woman who wasn't nice."

"I wish I were clever," said Rhoda.

"I'm so sorry I am," he answered humbly. They laughed.

"Now," said Rhoda. "You're not to worry any more. But you're to go home, and think out a plan, and bring about your reforms. Of course you're a gentleman, and fastidious. But politics are very like the bar, aren't they? You put aside all the personal part of you to be the mouthpiece of a cause. You make the best of your own case and the worst of your enemy's case. You state the truth in a violent way, so that it will get into people's thick heads. As long as it's the truth, how does it matter how you state it? That's what I always say."

By the light of the moon, now rising, frosty-bright, shaped like a great opal sloe, he looked at the calm, alert head, poised in pure contour, demure, quite conscious of his approval.

"That isn't quite enough," he said. The romance of

being with her was touching him. "Tell me, Rhoda. If I were to build up a press, quite cynically and in cold blood, merely to get power to back me when I try for my reforms, would you cut me?"

"Yes," she said smiling at him, "if you didn't tell me."

"And if I came to tell you?"

"I should be very proud. Any woman would be."

"And bored?"

"You said once that only the ignorant are bored. And I am very ignorant." She paused, thinking of the lot of woman. It had weighed lightly on her, but love for her friends, many of them so fine and so cruelly hampered, gave her words the sense of tragedy. "Women are ignorant, don't you think?" she said, "till—"

"Till they're the schoolmaster's fee?" he said, knitting his brows. "Yes. But ignorance isn't always bad. It need not be brutishness. Liveness of mind is the real need. Understanding. Not knowledge. It is that which women have, to a pitch of fineness and swiftness which awes me."

"It is very nice being a woman, sometimes," she said, meaning that it was being nice then. "And when will you begin your scheme? At once?"

"At once?" he answered. "No. I don't know. It's a pretty hopeless business. What would you do, Rhoda, in a pretty hopeless business?"

"Cry."

"I wish I could cry. I saw a man cry once. It has a tremendous psychologic effect, if you haven't made your audience angry. Nobody cries now in Parliament. They used to. Cromwell's Parliament were always crying. We've got so used to getting our passions out of papers, instead of out of actions, that we can't cry. We wait to see it in print, after it has passed

through a brain or two. I don't believe any man now in Parliament is sufficiently in earnest to cry. As long as they're cold enough to keep it on the intellectual plane, they can't be much in earnest. I'd like to get a few of them weeping mad, *pour encourager les autres*. I believe men refuse the suffrage for just that reason, that they're afraid of tears in the House. They're afraid of people being visibly in earnest among them. Tell me, Rhoda, do you look on the Plunket's as your home?"

"Yes," she said, "a woman's home is where her heart is, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "That's true. And you think me a pig for asking?"

"I don't like talking about myself as a general rule. But you're rather a special person."

"Thank you," he said. "Thinking that of you made me ask. Might I talk to you about yourself?"

"No," she said. "You must never talk to a woman about herself. It's such a frightfully poor compliment. You see, I'm being myself. You oughtn't to ask for more than that." He smiled at her.

"No," he said. "But there's more than one tense, isn't there? Even for a woman."

"It depends on the mood."

"And in your mood? If I asked?"

"'Rhoda, confess your past. I will forgive you all.' Oh, really, I'm afraid I'm very commonplace and rather expensive. I went to Nogent sur Seine for a year, and to Kaiserslautern for a year and to Fiesole for six months. Then I was at Hauton for a year. And then I came out at a Hunt Ball."

"What did you wear?"

"Black satin? No. I wore white that night. How funny you are. You're so interested in jewels and dresses."

"I always notice clothes. Inner and outer cor-

respond. Point of view is as much shown in dress as in business."

The conversation continued without appreciable progression. The moonlight brightened. A few stars, which had been sharp in the blue, took their proper places. The cold tightened. It seemed to still the night. The ruts on the road grew crisper. They resisted the passing feet. Owls called. On ahead was the station.

"Shall we wait for them?" said Lionel.

"No," said Rhoda. "We shall see them at the station." They went on to the station. They had five minutes to spare. They sat on a bench at the end of the platform. They looked, now at each other, now at the doorway which led from the booking-office to the platform. "They'll miss it if they don't hurry up," said Lionel. "We're signalled. Shall we wait for them?"

"No. We'll go on," said Rhoda. "It doesn't matter. Dora's father's out of town to-night." The engine drew up beside them. They got into an empty compartment far forward. Lionel, looking out of the window, saw no trace of the other two. "I hope they're all right," he said, as the train left the station. "You're sure we're not deserting them? Would you like the window up? It's freezing."

"A little open, please," she said. "I don't think they'll feel deserted, somehow. Come and sit beside me over here, and tell me about your rooms. I'm thinking of going to live in rooms, or in a tiny flat, as soon as my present life comes to an end."

"When Miss Plunket marries?" She nodded gravely, looking straight in front of her. She was looking at a frame of photographs on the opposite side of the carriage, trying to get an image of herself in the glass.

" You won't live alone, Rhoda? " he asked.

" Oh, yes," she said. " I shall have my maid. I shall be away all my week ends, and about half the year. And during the rest of the time I hope you'll come to tea with me to tell me about your schemes."

" That will be very nice. Will you bring Miss Plunket to tea some day with me, at my flat in the Temple? "

" We shall like that awfully," she said.

" What day will you come? "

" We could come almost any day." She paused, wondering if she had touched his mood. " Don't you like living in rooms? " she asked. " Isn't it awfully snug and independent? "

" You can look at it in that way," he said. " They're rather lonely. So will you come this day next week? "

" That will be lovely," she said. " I expect Dora will be able to come. And if she can't, you must come to tea with me, at our snugery in Whistler Square? "

" It's rather nice being a man sometimes," he said.

" Is it? "

" Very nice."

" Very nice? "

" When she makes it worth while. What do you do in your snugery? "

" Oh, read, and see our friends."

" And get frightfully depressed? "

" How do you know that? "

" I've noticed it. Depression is agony turned inwards. Energy is agony expelled. A woman has to turn all her agony into herself."

" I don't think I get so very much agony."

" I hope you don't get any."

" It's rather purposeless. And then, as you say, when it does hurt, a woman has to hug it to herself. And when it doesn't hurt, you may not ask us to dance. So there we are bottled up again."

"Rhoda. We're talking generally." He touched the grey glove on her knee. It was a little shy quick touch, instantly withdrawn. She looked at him gravely with a little glimmer of a frightened smile. "Might we talk intimately sometimes, Rhoda? Would you pay me that compliment, I mean? So that the best of us may get to know each other. You seem so awfully lonely. And . . . I would like to be the companion."

"I think you are already," she said, humbly.

"The real Rhoda seems a poor little woman in black satin, sitting alone over a fire, looking into the coals."

"What does she see?"

"A friend?"

"In the fire?"

"That would be something, wouldn't it? A friend in the fire. To talk to your mood, when you're sitting alone."

"Yes. It would be something," she said quickly. She was touched. "It would be very much. Very, very, very much. How did you guess? That's what is so wonderful."

"I didn't guess, Rhoda. You've got a sensitive mouth. And then the fact that . . . May I be on the intimate plane?" She looked at him, instead of answering.

"Your father was . . . rather . . . And Miss Plunket's more of an ally?"

"There's a great deal in Dora," she answered. "I'm very fond of her. But fathers are a mistake, don't you think?"

"Yes. How can elderly men, with settled habits and professions, understand young women? They very rarely understand boys. Mothers can be pretty dreadful. All this talk about filial duty is old woman's cant. The old have had their life. The children are the results. Now it's the children's turn to live. If they've

got life in them, that life's their duty. Not pottering about at the whim of an old fool's selfishness. Rhoda, every middle-class house has an altar on which daughters are sacrificed. What is it?"

"An altar? The billiard-table."

"I suppose it is that, now," he said, a little dashed. "Life is getting so vulgar. I meant the music-stool. How many saints and martyrs have endured that torment, to glut their parent's selfishness? Girls with lovers, girls with talents, girls with headaches, forced to 'play a little something' while the parent reflects on the dinner and falls asleep. What did you have to play, Rhoda?"

"Billiards before dinner and Chopin after. Sometimes I was almost frantic with neuralgia. You see I wouldn't have minded, only he'd no sense of what a woman is. A girl is a proud, very delicate, very fastidious, rather incomprehensible thing, even to herself. Father looked on me rather as a drag. Of course, he wanted to marry again, and I couldn't stand the sort of woman. He likes rather loud women with rather boisterous good spirits. I simply couldn't endure being with them. Or he thought me an unwelcome guest who ought to be paying for her board. He made me feel that he was doing me a favour in letting me keep house for him."

"Poor little Rhoda."

"I often didn't see a soul for a week, except these loud rattling women. Colin Maunsel said—— No, I don't think I'll tell you what he said about them. It's rather horrid."

"Tell me, Rhoda."

"He said they were glossy, just like mares, and that they whinnied. It was true, in a way."

"But you're happy now, Rhoda?"

"Just till Dora goes, I've a lucid interval."

"And you're happy to the finger-tips when you are happy, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said. She was radiantly well. Women know the worth of health.

"You were happy a week ago?"

"Yes."

"You glow when you are happy," he said. "One can see the happiness in your hair."

"It's not glossy?"

"No. It's luminous. You are luminous. You give one the impression of glowing."

In the dusk of the railway carriage the richness of her colour gave that impression; but the glowing was mainly in himself. The train stopped at a long, lit, deserted platform. Two women, with white shawls over their heads, stepped hurriedly into a first-class carriage. A door slammed. A porter held a lantern aloft.

"Is this Acley, Mr. Heseltine?"

"Yes. But. I say."

"What?"

"Might it be Lionel?"

"Perhaps, some day," she answered, smiling. "But don't frighten me. A good deal has happened, hasn't it?"

"Yes. A good deal. Nothing happens in life for long times together. And then something happens which makes all the long times significant."

"And rather foolish."

"Empty, not foolish."

"My life has been rather foolish."

"It made you, Rhoda. A very delightful woman, with beauty, and delicacy, and taste, isn't made by folly. Now we're getting near London. Let me look you in the face, to see if you're fit to be seen." He changed to the seat facing her, and summed her up,

quizzically. "Your hair's a little wild," he said. "Otherwise you're a most respectable young woman. You're not too cold, are you, from travelling?"

"No," she said. "I am glowing, thank you."

"Tell me, Rhoda," he said, "it's pretty foggy here, you see. You'll let me see you home?"

"Oh, but . . . Are you sure you don't mind?"

"We'll go in a taxi," he said. He helped her out of the train on to the platform crowded with porters. Outside there was the glowering yellowness which is the prevalent colour of London winter air. "How d'you keep your colour in this, Rhoda?" he asked. "You must be incandescent."

"I've only got one skin," she said. "Most people have three. That's what I was always told. The incandescent theory is not borne out by statistics."

She settled into the corner of the taxi-cab, with that evident physical joy in comfort which marked so many of her actions. The coldness of the cab made her shiver a little. He drew up both windows. He swiftly slipped his heavy coat and tucked it round her. She protested, but he was too quick and too masterful.

"Yes. You must," he said, "I can't have you getting a chill. Is that any warmer?"

"Yes," she said. "That's lovely. It's lovely being taken care of. That's the really warming thing, isn't it?" The car crept among the hurrying traffic. In the quiet roads of the Park, it began to rush. It seemed to suck in the ribbon of road, gleaming from the gaslight. The road sucked up disappeared. The car rushed on for more. The two friends, sitting side by side, stared ahead at the night they were charging.

"Rhoda."

"Yes."

"Comfy?"

"Yes. Very."

"It'll soon be over."

"It's much less foggy here, isn't it?"

Her right hand lay on the coat. He covered it with his hand. She did not withdraw her hand, though it shrank a very little. A deep breath stopped a tendency to shudder. They were silent. When the car turned into Whistler Square from Manet Street his hand pressed hers lightly. She was glad of her glove, and frightened, and off her guard. The car was rushing up the square to the Plunket's number.

"Good-bye, Rhoda," he said. She saw a gleam on the little mirror in front of her. The blood was throbbing in her throat. She was beginning to tremble. She felt goaded to laugh before she burst into tears. She swallowed hard. "Let . . . Let . . ." she said.

He opened the door for her, and she got out. She went swiftly up the steps to the door. She stood there for a moment, breathing down the unsuspected nature, biting her lip, still trembling a little. She was mistress of herself again, though she feared a new attack, when he stood beside her outside the door.

"May I ring?" he said. "Here's your little hand-bag. You left it on the seat."

"My key's in the bag," she said, wondering at her strange hard voice. "Get it out, will you? My hands are cold." He opened the little bag. It was odorous with the warm sweet scent. A little handkerchief was stuffed within it; a neat green leather purse, long and narrow like a spectacle case, lay below the handkerchief, a key, a card-case, and some chocolate croquettes in silver paper, lay at the bottom of all. He fished out the key, and opened the door. The hall within showed warm and vivid after the melancholy of the fog. He gave back the hand-bag.

"Good-bye, Rhoda," he said.

"Come in," she said. "Won't you come in?"

"No, I won't come in," he said. "Thank you very much."

"I want you to come in. You must come in," she said. "You must see where I live. Come on up to the snuggerly for a moment."

He could not well refuse though he was conscious of an anti-climax. She felt it, too, though she could not define her feeling. He followed her into the hall. She picked up a couple of letters from a silver salver on the hall table. For just an instant she looked at them, in the warm soft light of the hall fire and great rose-shaded standard lamp. She put them unopened into her pocket. "Leave your coat, won't you?" she said. Her voice was quite cold and hard. She looked wan. He left his coat on a coffer beneath a Claude Lorraine mirror, which reflected the hall without reflection, like an unintelligent painting. Rhoda was going upstairs. She turned, coldly, on the seventh stair, to give him confidence with a smile. He followed her to a little landing, and thence, by a turn, to a big one, from which many white doors opened glaringly from rose-coloured walls. It was like walking in Dora Plunket's mind. Rhoda crossed the landing to the right, and opened a door. A dim room, full of knick-knacks, showed. It was fire-lit and lamp-lit. There were many silver frames, a gleaming brass Indian table, many pretty chintzes, a few water-colours.

"There is a fire," said Rhoda. "Will you wait a minute? I must just change. I won't be a minute." Lionel waited. He looked round the room. A pot contained a shrub with beautiful big red and yellow berries. One of the pictures, of sea under wind, was clever. Photographs of Colin Maunsel faced photographs of Rhoda, Dora, Milly, and Polly. Polly *poudrè* in a Louis Seize gown, laughed at Rhoda as a Giorgione portrait. Two escritaires presented every

possible inconvenience for writing. The one which he guessed to be Rhoda's was littered with mimic Sèvres, little porcelain rose-bushes, little porcelain tulips, all very exquisite. A big silver cigarette box lay on a table. On another table, in a book-case bound with brass, were some twenty novels, a few new magazines, and a few new books of eighteenth-century memoirs. He opened one of these. There were many reproductions from portraits of forgotten fools. "Ach, Gott," he thought. "What were we in the eighteenth century? One would think we were a race of actresses and pimps." The carpet was a rosy plain-cloth. A white bearskin made a hearthrug. The chairs were cheap, comfortable wicker chairs abundantly cushioned. There was a modern gilt imitation French mirror over the mantelpiece. Lionel smoothed down his hair before it. He was not a vain man, but he was proud of his hands. They were in need of washing. He steadied his tie. He began to examine a replica of the Hypnos which stood in the centre of the mantelpiece. Wondering at the nature of the spirit which had once worn that gentle face kept him from wondering what it did there. What beauty could we moderns set beside it, he wondered. "Gentle Mrs. Opie?" he thought. No. She, for all her charms, was mainly housewife. Or a lady by Mancini, a wonderful puzzle of a lady, who had puzzled even the painter? He had seen her once at the New Gallery. No. The Mancini lady was a puzzle even to herself, and therefore imperfect. Or Mrs. Drummond? Yes. Mrs. Drummond had that beauty. He craned over to get the side face. Yes. In the side face it was like Mrs. Drummond; markedly like. There was just that gentle sweetness of the soul who has got hold of life. Perhaps since the Greeks not more than three artists have cared for that kind of soul. He was still wondering at the peace of the face when the door opened.

Rhoda streamed in in her black satin, with her hair brushed in a new way.

"Rhoda," he said, "how quick you've been." She came hurriedly to the fireplace. She bent, and held her hands to the blaze with a little shiver.

"Cold in my room," she said, with a quick glance up at him. "What a lovely fire! I just flew into my things, so as not to keep you. Am I very untidy?" She rose, and patted off invisible dust from her bodice, craning forward to the mirror. Her eyes met his in the mirror. She laughed.

"Am I untidy?" she asked again, coquetting.

"Look at me. And I'll tell you," he said. "Full face is tidy. A little round, please. Now the other side. There are two or three hairs rather waggish behind your left ear."

"Untidy?"

"Rather nice. You are rather a nice person, Rhoda. I've not seen that necklace. And I've not seen that bangle. What other adornments? I've seen the smile. Have I seen the look in the eyes?" She nodded. Her eyes took him in in a sudden dancing glance.

"The same look?" he queried. "Not quite the same look, Rhoda?"

She hung her head, and stole a shy glance; her mouth trembled a little, she was humble and a little afraid. He saw her trouble and gave her breath.

"Is this where you come to gaze into the fire, Rhoda?" She nodded.

"Which chair? This chair?" She nodded. He drew it up for her. She wanted petting. He settled the cushions. They were big white, very soft cushions, sprinkled with little red sprigs. He noticed them as being probably her choice. Dora cut a broad swathe carelessly. Some one had been deliberate over these cushions, nearly rejecting them, perhaps. "Sit down,

Rhoda," he said. "Let's gaze into the fire together, shall we?"

"Bad for the eyes," she said weakly, settling herself in. She leaned forward, resting her cheek on one hand. Her left little finger moving slightly, softly caressed her cheek. "Where will you sit? Will you sit there?" She smiled, but she was feeling very near to tears, she was so happy. He took Dora's chair. The fire put a glow upon him. Otherwise it was dim enough for his wrinkles not to show. He looked five years younger by firelight. Rhoda, stealing a shy quick glance, saw how handsome he would have been if he had not gone to those horrid tropics, where colour becomes varnish, and the peach-skin a wet cloak ill-laid-up. She was very proud of him. He was thinking how narrow his womanless life had been. How rose-pink life became suddenly with the entrance of this shy sweet point of view. He had not realised before how woman completes a man. He thought that it would be a little thing to fight the world, if he had this to come to, at the end of the day's battle.

"Rhoda."

"Yes."

"When shall I see you again?"

"This day week, if Dora can come."

"Could I see you to-morrow?"

She shook her head. "No. Not to-morrow. I've got to entertain here. What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"I'm going to start my work, as we planned."

"You'll promise to tell me everything?"

"Don't let yourself in for more than you can help."

He stood up, smiling. He looked very charming when he smiled. "I must go, Rhoda," he said; "when can we talk again? As we talked this evening?"

"That was good talk," she said. She stood up,

pensively. She seemed preoccupied with a little silver stand of matches beside the Hypnos. Her finger stroked the matches into a bunch, and scattered them into open order. She was tasting again, in all its sweetness, the touch on her glove at the beginning of intimacy.

"When can it be again, Rhoda?"

"Come on Sunday," she said. "Come to tea and stay supper."

"Rhoda, my friend."

"Yes."

"May I have this little photograph?" He picked up a midget from the mantel.

"It's Dora's."

"Mayn't I bag it? Dora doesn't want it. She's got the original."

"I've got another you might have. It's a better one than that."

"Is it in your desk? That's your desk, isn't it?"

"Yes. That is mine. Of course." She went swiftly to it and pulled open a drawer.

"I knew it was yours," he said. "The little Sèvres things are so like you."

"They're pretty, aren't they?" She took out a photograph of herself in a Spanish costume. She had a rose in her hair. She held a fan archly. "Would you like this?" she asked. "It's like me. It's the last I had done." She had something palmed in her other hand.

"Thank you," he said. "May I really have it, Rhoda?"

"Really and truly. D'you think it's like?"

"Very like," he said. "But our Rhoda wears golfing things, doesn't she?"

"Perhaps our Rhoda will get taken one of these days. Here." She slipped a tiny toy tulip into his hand. It

was a little gem of porcelain, pot, leaves, and bloom, an inch and a half long.

"Thank you, Rhoda," he said. "That will remind me of the golfing." A peculiar knock sounded far below in the hall.

"Here's Dora," said Rhoda. "You'll stay to see her?"

"No, Rhoda. I must go. Good-bye, Rhoda."

"Good-bye." She looked at him frankly, but under the pressure of his hand her eyes drooped. He held her hand.

"Good-bye?" he queried. She turned her face aside, wan to the lips. "Good-bye?"

"Lionel," she said faintly.

"God bless you, Rhoda." Dora entered

CHAPTER VIII

THE winter was sad to Mary Drummond. She kept her Christmas in bed. The attack of influenza left her nervous and depressed. She went to the South of France for a month. Two days after her return to England, her husband was knocked down by a motor car in the Strand. His skull was fractured. About an hour later he died in the emergency ward of one of the Charing Cross Hospitals, without recovering consciousness. At the inquest it was proved that he was drunk at the time of the accident. "He was never sober after ten," so his landlord swore. "He was always a perfect gentleman," his landlady said, "but 'e did use to exceed." A "commission agent" who had been "looking out for a commission" at the corner of Bedford Street, at the time of the accident (half past twelve at midnight), said that deceased ran in front of the motor car, "pretendin' 'e was a cop." The driver of the car, white-faced and sick, with the terror of a charge of manslaughter hanging over him, tried to make the coroner believe that his car was going at the rate of one mile an hour. "If I'd been going more'n that," he said, "I'd have gone over him, the way he came at me." The coroner seemed very bored by the proceedings. He said that he did not know "what to make of evidence like that." Somebody then said that the driver had been in trouble once before, for exceeding the speed limit. The jury stared at the driver. A big policeman mopped his brow. A facetious doctor deposed to having treated the deceased for nervous derangement caused by drink. In his opinion the man wasn't in his right mind. He was a dipsomaniac. He wrote some of his evidence on a card. Ernest

Gavin swore that he had dined with the deceased just before the accident. Drummond was sober then. So it went on.

Common sense is a good guide among the bitterness of factions. The jury exonerated the driver. It was an accident. "The deceased met his death by accident, while under the influence of drink." The newspaper reports omitted the last six words of the finding. "Mr. St. Clare Drummond," they said, "was born in 1868, and educated on the Continent. He was the author of *Prose Poems* (1889), *The Etchings of Fragonard* (impressions, 1892), *The Green Symbol* (novel, 1895), *Sonnets of the Passion* (1902.) Since 1904 Mr. Drummond has published nothing, but his work on the *Backwash* and other high-class periodicals is well-known. Mr. Drummond married in 1895."

The death confirmed the opinion of those who knew him. "He was a drunken beast, and queer in other ways." Those who knew wondered at the tone of the Press. Those who knew Mrs. Drummond were glad.

Her feelings were hard to define. She had not seen her husband for many years. He died, and was buried out of her heart, many years before, on the night of the discovery. The drunkard's sudden death was not frightful to her. She felt a vague relief that that page in her life was now turned, forever. She was not sorry for him. She had foreseen some such end from the first. It is hard to feel real grief for a man whom one has not seen for fifteen years. She was not the kind of woman to indulge in sentiment about him. But his death was a sharp reminder that he had once lived. Little memories of him became bright again. The great memories hurt again. Sitting alone in her flat, she felt that her life had slipped away, and that the great things had failed her.

Thinking of the past gave her a longing to look again

at what the past had left to her. She went to the little sitting room which her friend Kitty Minot used as a workroom whenever she was in town. There were two fine old coffers in the room. They were always kept locked. They had belonged to her father. They contained nearly all that remained to her of the men and women whose spirits had been influences in her life. She seldom opened these coffers. She felt that times long past should be left in the past, after the something enduring has been proved from them. Her past had not been happy. One less rare and gentle would have sunk under such blows from life, or failed, in that worst failure, a heartless endurance. She looked at the coffers. One was of oak, black with age and of immense weight. The other, much smaller, was plated and barred with iron. It resembled the Chatham Chest, once filled by the twopences of seamen. The ironwork upon it was strong and good, not handsome, but with all a man's virtue in it. Mary Drummond always hesitated before unlocking that chest.

She unlocked the oak chest, and thrust back the heavy lid. She lifted the green cloth which kept the contents from dust. A fragrance of lavender rose from within. One of the muslin bags had burst. Little bluish pellets of lavender had scattered among the packages. There were many packages. She turned them over gently, wondering why she kept them all, yet knowing that she could not burn them. She took out half a dozen packages. Opening them, one at a time, she entered again into the past, with the feeling that it was infinitely dead. There were letters from friends who had been dead for twenty years, letters from people who had been dear, letters about people who had been forgotten. There were other things than letters. There were dance programmes, scrawled with names. She smiled when she saw these.

Years before, in her dancing days, she had jotted down on each programme a note of the dress she had worn. There were the notes. "White satin." "Green silk, V. lace." She remembered some of the dresses clearly. Some of the names on the programmes were familiar; some of the dances. She thought of the dance tunes. How they had changed. Here was a little old account book, containing the diary and "accounts" of her first visit to London, at the age of twelve. She had bought a tiny eighteenth-century brooch, set with minute seed pearls. She had it still. There was the record. "Bought a brooch at Thomasson's in Oxford Street, 13s. 6d." She opened another packet. It contained letters from her mother. She was nearly sixteen when her mother died. She thought, suddenly, that it was ten years since she had read these letters of her mother's. How one forgets the dead. How many myriads of mothers enter the earth and the night. She remembered the words of her old Irish nurse, when they had stood together for the first time at the grave of that dear one. "Let you not be troubled, Miss Mary. Indeed, there's a lot of foolishness the Protestants do be talking. It's well-known the mothers come back. Wouldn't the good God know their wants?" Her old nurse was alive still, in the County Wicklow. She was alive still. Her mother lay under the grass. The Mummy who had been so good to her, for whom she had cried so. What is the meaning of Death? He breaks all that is dear. He breaks love across the bones of his knees, as blindly as he kills the fool.

She read through all her mother's letters. As she read, she remembered little noblenesses in her mother's character. If the door might open, now, and the dead appear. If they might talk it out, as dear friends, two grey-haired women together. She put away the letters, sighing. She looked at the bottom of the chest for

another package. A ribbon had broken. The letters of one of the packages were scattered among the lavender pellets. She took them up, wondering what they were. They were letters which she had received a quarter of a century before, at a time very sacred to her. She had not looked at them for years, twenty years perhaps, perhaps more. She looked at them with curiosity. She had forgotten about them. What were they? What did each mean? How strange they were. A receipted hotel bill, a grocer's account, the card for the Tubber Races, 1884, letters from her dressmaker, a note from one Julia Harcourt, saying that she would be in for tea at five o'clock. Why, Julia had been dead for twenty-three years, pitched out of a trap, poor girl. What else was there? An answer to the advertisement for a bangle lost at the races. One Pat McKeown had found a bangle, "with like coloured beads on it." Pat McKeown, a squat North Irish farmer with curly hair. At the bottom of all was a note asking her to take part in a croquet tournament. There was to be a croquet tournament at Castle Slemish, and would she make one? The note had an irregular yellow stain upon it. It looked as though tea had been spilled upon it. The writing was the writing of a clever, lovable character. There was no weakness in the hand, but little waywardnesses, humours, charm. It was a boyish hand, written by one whose people, for generations, had lived happy lives, free from any taint of the baseness and hardness of commerce. It takes six generations to breed out the taint of commerce. Mary Drummond turned the page, wondering who had written the letter. She read it through.

"DEAR MARY,—I hear from Mrs. Henryson that you will be stopping till the 10th. It would be very nice if you would come over, one afternoon, before the tourna-

ment. You were saying that you would like to paint the sweet-pea hedge. It is at its best now. I have never seen it so beautiful. Will you come on Tuesday next? Come in the morning so as to have time for your sketch.—Yours very sincerely, LYDIA HESELTINE."

That was this young man's mother, a gentle sad-looking woman with a winning smile and a grave voice. Dead many years ago of course. Dear Mrs. Heseltine who was so gentle in a day of pain a quarter of a century before. Mary Drummond felt a pang of pity for the dead. You poor dead who were so gentle with us. Are these stray meetings with relics of you a sign that your love works on from the dust, bringing peace, bringing beauty? All the blessings in life may be the gift of the dead.

"Nous devrions pourtant lui porter quelques fleurs."

She re-tied the scattered letters, drew down the dust cloth and locked the chest. She would not read more of that ancient history. She peeped for an instant under the iron lid of the smaller chest. She touched something white and soft which lay within. Then she locked that, too. She left the room, humming Bach's "Komm Jesu." The past may become a torment, but a very little of its ashes will make one glad of the sun. She was cheered. She felt happier than she had been for some weeks. She played to herself, dusted her precious Crown Derby tea-set, talked for twenty minutes with her maid, and then settled down to read. Her book was the never failing *Recit d'une Sœur*. She knew many of its pages by heart. It had been more than a joy to her; it had been an intimate companion during many years. After half an hour of reading, her mind wandered into her memories again. She thought again of those old days in Ireland when the glory had happened. She found herself thinking of Lydia Hesel-

tine. She tried to remember more of her. She tried to bring back into her mind a memory of Cushnacraga. Tiny incidents of the day of her visit occurred to her. A horse had cast a shoe on the way back. The house had almost vanished from her memory. She remembered the drive, the sweet-pea hedge, and the gentle lady. She could remember nothing more. A perfect August day and a drive by the sea.

She thought of the young man in the Temple, wondering how his work was going. Her mind played its swift rapier round her memories of him. She was sorry for him. She thought of the amount of harm an unscrupulous energy may do in the world. She wished that she might see more of him. In a few days she was going into the country, to the house which she shared with Kitty Minot. Perhaps he would come to stay with them. Vulgar women use their enchantments to obtain an entrance into the lives of men. There are few things more pitiful in life. The vulgar mind, when cased in a woman's body, may enter into any house of the soul, draw to herself the riches of it, make waste of them, toss them about, with the pretentious criticism of the vulgar, steal from them, with the whore's wiles, all in the name of love, to the tune love pipes. A love of power in the heartless and the mindless produces in time the modern heroine, the woman with a past, unhappy because her power of getting power has won for her only the presence of the unseen dead who sit at meat with her, rise up, and follow her, in the brain's flameless hell for ever. Vulgar women of the kind are responsible for woman's position to-day. Men know their weakness too well to give away the little hold they have upon such people. Mary Drummond hesitated at her writing-table, lest Lionel should mistake her interest in him for a feminine wile. The stealthy stretching of the cat's paw, all velvet, before the clutch of capture.

He was lonely. Would he come to them for a week-end. She wrote a brief note, saying nothing about the loneliness. She played with her pen for a little while. "He is prey marked out," she thought. She saw in her mind the advance of the creature, all, outwardly, thoughtful for his welfare, all, inwardly, greedy for her own pleasure or profit. Perhaps he would be saved by his want of emotion. His intellect dominated him. He would see a lack of intellect where the creature would wish him to perceive a want of sympathy.

The bell made a gentle klirr in the passage. The maid's feet rustled along the matting to the door. Little Polly Hamlin came in, breathless.

"My dear Cousin Mary," she cried.

"Why, Polly dear, how are you?" They embraced.

"Come to the fire," said Mrs. Drummond. "We'll have tea. How well you're looking, Polly. What have you been doing?"

"I've been dining at the Plunkets. Very grown-up. I've been meeting all the world."

"Well. Tell me of the world," said Mrs. Drummond. "I've been out of the world since Christmas. Who was there?"

"Eric and his wife. Looking very newly-married-coupledish. Cousin Mary, what makes them look such sheep?"

"A sense of the disproportion between their emotions and the world's opinion of them. Eric, the bold, wild mountain goat, too. Who had you?"

"Rupert had me. Billy on the other side. Billy's giving me a perfect love of a blue Persian."

"You seem to have had a prosperous evening. Who else was there?"

"Dora. Colin Maunsel. A Mr. Staunton. Everybody thought he was going to marry Dora. He's not nearly good enough. But now it seems that he's

become a Roman Catholic; and so that's at an end. Rhoda was there, of course. Olivia Farwell. Eleanor. Billy, Mr. Lion Heseltine, and Rupert. I think that was all. Mrs. Rupert wasn't there. I'm afraid she won't be back for a fortnight. Rhoda told us the most heavenly ghost story."

"Rhoda Derrick? She's engaged to Colin Maunsel?"

"No. Mother thinks that that's all off. Lion Heseltine's the new flame."

"Your father's great ally."

"Yes. Father thought him very clever."

"And you—what do you think?"

"I?" Polly asked. She thought for a second. "I think he's one of those very conscientious men, who just aren't geniuses because they do the things which genius never tries."

"I haven't seen the conscientious side," Mrs. Drummond answered. "But he certainly strikes one as being in earnest."

"Father says that he has given up more for science than any living man."

"Is that the new newspaper scheme? I heard of that. Is that coming to anything?"

"He's been getting the money for it. It's rather fine of him. He's been selling a very precious family picture."

"The Correggio?"

"Yes. Haven't you seen the papers? The papers have been full of it."

"I've been having a rest cure, Polly. I haven't even read an affiche."

Polly instantly led the conversation away from newspapers. She blushed, remembering Drummond's death. Mary Drummond, guessing her thought, diverted it.

"I've been in France, Polly. I've been in Provence,

picking up old iron and silver. I've got treasures, Polly. You must come into my room and choose a treasure " She rose with the grace of movement of a girl, caught her friend's arm, and walked her off to see the spoils.

After Polly had gone, Mary Drummond looked at the evening newspaper. As she had feared, there was plenty about the sale of the Correggio. The young man had rigged the market. He had worked successfully (through a firm of dealers, and the hysterical press) that "saving of the picture to the nation" which ensures a big price. There were aggravating circumstances in this case. The dealers, astute as they were, had met their match. They had brought a suit against Lionel; they had been exposed; and they had lost their case. Lionel had triumphed; but it was not a triumph worthy of his mother's son.

"I will go to see that young man," she said.

CHAPTER IX

THAT evening, Lionel sat alone in his rooms thinking of Rhoda and Dora, who had called upon him. The memory of their good spirits lived after them. How different the room seemed with only the memory of them. Dora, careless and outrageous, had sat to the right of the fire, flicking off her cigarette ash, in the pauses of defiant chaff. Rhoda, happy, and full of merry chatter, had sat where he now sat. They had put a sparkle on the room. He had enjoyed their visit. The memory of Rhoda's grace, as she sat forward, putting up her veil, touched him. He thought over every detail of her. There was nothing about her which was not definitely a part of her spirit. She was all fastidious, scrupulously feminine, yet, in a shy, though quite definite way, she was original, as all fine personal taste must be. Her hat, her veil, the jewel at her throat, all the beauty and mystery of her dress, were all revelations of her spirit. And her spirit was a revelation of the spirit which lies beyond life. What lies beyond life? A spirit with moods. A feminine, yielding spirit who gives what she is forced to give, and stabs in the back when she has yielded. Something like that. It is enough for us to know that she yields to the passionate demand, however revengeful her knife may be. Or it may be that life is merely stupidity, and the beyond life, to which we strain in fine moments, when we see the image of it in a woman's spirit, an exaltation for all that is noble in us.

He thought over what they had said. He wished to resolve into words what they had been to him, so that he might get to the truth about them. His problem

was whether shyness is a screen or a positive quality. He half rose from his chair and felt along the mantel for a cigarette. His fingers touched an ash tray. Groping further, they knocked against a paper half tucked under the stand where the cigarettes lay. The stand was just out of reach. Some one had moved it. He had to stand up to get what he wanted. He lit his cigarette, with an eye on the spill. Glancing down he noticed the paper beside the cigarette stand. It was a folded note, addressed to him. Rhoda must have slipped it under the cigarette stand just as she was going. It was a small single sheet of notepaper folded tightly in three folds. It smelt slightly of lavender. He had noticed a lavender sachet among the litter in her desk. It was addressed in her elusive, feminine hand to "L. Heseltine, Esq." He unfolded it, and read. It was dated Friday, above the neatly embossed address of 61, Whistler Square, Chelsea, S.W.

"DEAR LIONEL,—How is the work going? You must tell me on Sunday! How is the depression? Better, I hope.—Yours sincerely, 'RHODA.'"

He read it through several times, trying to get at the spirit which had prompted her to write. He realised that she had brought the note not quite knowing what to do with it. It had run a good chance of being dropped into the fire undelivered. As it had not been so dropped, he concluded that he had pleased her that afternoon. He wondered what he had said to decide her. He did not doubt that the note had cost her much to write. The "Lionel" and the concluding "Rhoda" must have been a wild adventure to that shy soul. The writing puzzled him. It must once have been the clear round hand of the sprightly but empty girl. Now it had gained in character. The neatness was gone. The writing drooped at the ends of words. The lines

sagged downwards a little. Letters and syllables tended to break away here and there. There was decided dash in some of the capitals, especially in the L of Lionel. She had written the L in a rush. Other letters, the i's, t's, and the e's were irregular. No doubt they would have been better written had the writer been more sure of herself at the time of writing. Altogether, it was the hand of a woman with a style of her own, and with a perception of style a good deal more strong, perhaps, than her power of achievement. Meanwhile, more might be made of the character. It touched him that those who had dealt with that character had not made more of it. What a set they were. The father, with his billiards and noisy, red-faced rattles; the outrageous, haphazard Dora, famed, in Hamlin legend, to have dressed once as a corner boy, and to have taken her pint of black and tan, with a fill of Cavendish, in some low pub in Chelsea; Maunsel, no, Maunsel had brains; old Plunket.

The clock struck once for half past six. He went to the table for some letter paper. He sat down to answer the note. Glowing as he was from the thought of her, he found the letter hard to write. There was the inclination to say too much, the inclination to say everything. He burned several sheets. When, at last, he had pleased himself and the envelope lay sealed and addressed, the glow took hold of him. He gave way to it. He sat staring at the fire, while her image floated before him, catching him up in pangs. He was an outcast, burnt in the face by three continents. She was something too pure and delicate for a wild man like himself. His nature knelt to her. The grace of her gentle carriage was enough to mark her as something elect and different. He looked at the photograph. He read her letter through, repeating it.

Outside, on the landing, some one was knocking at

his door. The knock was gentle but firm, evidently a woman's knock, probably a lady's. He wondered for a moment, with a gush of delight, if it could be the girls come back, to ask him to join them in something. He waited for an instant, and then remembered that Mrs. Holder had gone. He would have to open the door himself. Something strange was in the night. It was cold, it was dark. He had the feeling that his lamp-light was a miracle, and that all beauty is merely a quicker heart-beat at the removal of darkness and cold. He drew the lamp to the end of the table so that it might light the hall when he opened the door. "Who can it be?" he wondered. He passed down the hall, conscious of an ancestral memory, of having once gone to a cave's mouth from the hearth within, to some long-forgotten summons. He pressed back the catch, and opened the door. A woman was standing there. The stairs were villainously lighted. He could not see who it was. She seemed all swathed and dim.

"Is that you, Mr. Heseltine?" said a voice.

"Mrs. Drummond?" he cried. "Come in. Come in, won't you?"

"I want to speak to you if I may," she said. "Are you free? Are you alone?"

"Yes," he said. "Come in. I say. It's turned jolly cold, hasn't it? And how are you?" They shook hands in the hall. Her hand lay very limply in his. She passed in quickly to the sitting-room, where she sat down and closed her eyes for an instant. He followed her after some little delay. There was a sharp draught under his door. He stayed to lay a sandbag along the foot of it. An envelope lay on the door-mat. He picked it up before returning. It was the advertisement of Grinnell's Kitchen Coal. He walked back quickly into the sitting-room.

"Excuse my keeping you waiting," he said. He

looked at her sharply. She was dressed in a mouse-coloured corduroy with a grey fur muff and boa. She looked worn and anxious. "Have you dined?" he asked.

"No," she said, smiling. "Not yet."

"Well," he said. "Shall we go out and dine? D'you know the Cheshire Cheese? Or would you prefer Simpson's?"

"I'm not quite sure that I ought to dine with you," she said, "till we've had our talk." She seemed ill at ease about something.

"At this end of town one can't talk business without food," he said. "At the other end one can't do it without drink. I'm sorry I've got nothing here: but I generally dine out." He knit his brows at her suddenly with quickened interest. Had the cold upset her, or did she feel that she had done something frightful in calling on a lonely man? Woman is an arsenal of potential pain. He ran over the possibilities swiftly. It couldn't be the cold. It couldn't be nervousness. No. He wasn't sure about nervousness. He himself was a Bohemian, used to frank intercourse; but he was always being startled by the terrors of those less free. She was upset by something. There were some bottles of drugs on his book-shelf. Among them was a bottle of eau-de-cologne. He reached it down and dug out the cork with a penknife.

"This room's too hot for you, after the cold," he said. "Have some eau-de-cologne on your handkerchief." She refused the refreshment, smiling.

"No, thanks very much," she said. "I've come to speak to you on a very delicate matter, and . . . Of course in coming to you I put aside all my weapons. So may we talk . . . talk without any considerations of me as one entitled to—as a woman in short! Will you treat me just as an intelligence?"

Lionel's look became a shade more cautious. "Oh, yes," he said frankly. He wondered what she wanted. What did women want, anyhow? He steeled himself to "some damned talk of idealism."

"But you must dine first," she said. "Will you show me one of these city taverns? Or are women not admitted? They date, don't they, from a time when men at dinner were not a fit sight for ladies?"

"They date from the good old days," said Lionel. "Stap my vitals."

"You men led a fine manly life then," she said, musing.

"No. The life led us," he corrected. "No life was 'led' in England till Lord Lister's time. Fools and blind, Mrs. Drummond. And a heritage of exhausted nerves for us sons of light, their succeeders. Lord, Lord, if we'd half the vitality those beasts destroyed for us. Think of their vitality. It was monstrous. It was bestial. They couldn't even converse like human beings till they were drunk. They could only shout 'Yoicks,' or 'Zounds,' or 'Damme,' or some other foolery. They were like great joltering bulls. All force. They could only bellow. Human life was impossible for them till they were drunk. They had to wine their force down to human strength, just as we water whisky. Good Lord, all that potential beauty drowned by port. The waste of it. And we have the hand-twitch and the tremor. We. We. We with our radium and the airship, and Major Ross."

"We're being just as wasteful," she answered, standing up. "Think of all the nervous energy frictioned off by speed. We don't drown it with port! but we waste it in our endeavours to run away from life. Every generation tries to escape from its essential quality. That is why Athens fought Syracuse instead of subsidising Socrates. There was a lot of solid thought in the eighteenth century."

"They built a heavy tomb for Truth. But come." He opened the door for her. She passed out gravely smiling at some far-away image of far-away solid philosophers, arguing from Paley after monstrous imbibitions of punch. To hunt over undrained clay, dine monstrously, drink guzzlingly, get hot about Church, and believe in Paley: there was a way of life for one. We can't do any one thing of the five.

The couple dined at the Cheshire Cheese. They rallied each other about eighteenth-century science, art, life, criticism, war, death, all the wonderful time. Lionel, with his fingering for style, dwelt on Goldsmith's verse, on something exquisitely said in Shenstone, something about jasmine. He laid precise touch on De Mandeville, that strange, vivid mind who wrote such prose. He sparkled on Morogues. They sparred about Hogarth. Lionel proposed a theory that all the great men of the great time, the essentially English time, had O's in their names, strongly sounded. He instanced Boswell, Johnson, Goldsmith, Hogarth, Reynolds, Smollett, Gainsborough. And from this he passed to the fantasy that an O in one's name is necessary to success in life. It made all the difference between Byng and Nelson. No man called Bong could have resisted the impulse to close action. Life is an impulse to broad vowels. That is why the west of England is so healthy. She laughed. There was a charm in Lionel's whimsicality which touched her. It gave her a sense of the loneliness in which the man had lived. Discussion arose, was it there, or in another place, that the Quaker lady sat on Dr. Johnson's knee? And could any Quaker lady, and any literary knee of to-day, either sit or tacitly approve such session, here and now, in the year of grace, company being present? Something has changed in us. The female soul is a much more subtle thing. The male knee and Paley no longer suffice her.

After dinner, they recrossed Fleet Street to the flat. The street was beginning work now. The great upper windows were alight. Clerks going west on the tops of omnibuses looked in on the clever heads bowed over the desks, twisting the half true to the wholly partial. Galleys and flimsies were coming in. On the side walks the journalists were hurrying. They were very like each other. They had the same keenness, and thinness and want, the same glasses, the same hair, or want of hair. What would they have been a century ago? What could have satisfied them? What would life have made of them? Something, no doubt: for they were many. The taverns were full of them. A fine freight of intellect has been wrecked in the Fleet Street taverns. Secret people were creeping out to editors, to offer "special information," mostly false, for whatever the editors would offer. Telegraph messengers dodged about, with that curious see-saw of the body which jerks them past people right and left. Newsboys slid past on bicycles, dispensing papers to running friends. There was a hurry and a jostle, a sense of dirt and discomfort, a sense of the machine being too old for its work, a sense of the want of light. Omnibuses loitered past at a jog. Motors slowed down to the same pace. The clumsy beast of London traffic dragged its length along in a pageant of stupidity. Men stood outside the Temple entrance, staring straight in front of them. They had the air of waiting for some one. At times they took brief turns up or down. Then they halted again and fronted, staring straight ahead, vacantly, with common faces, and eyes glazed. They were waiting for the waitresses of the tea shops down the street.

As they passed through the doorway Lionel thought of Rhoda. He felt how sharply she contrasted with the woman at his side. Mrs. Drummond's grave beauty,

which looked so worn and old in certain lights, had nothing to offer him. It was attractive, as mystery is, but it offered nothing. He was in a mood of wanting. And Rhoda's face offered, and allured. The youth in her was crying out to him. His own youth, repressed so long in Earth's wilds, where youth is only one spear more in the struggle, flamed out from its bonds to answer her. What was the sense of the struggle, the watch and the clutch with death, the hell, the glare and the madness, when life was tripping past in this quick beauty, vivid with blood? He looked at Mrs. Drummond as they passed the lamp. His thought was, "Suppose you were she. Suppose we were going home together." Something in her face checked the supposition. Their eyes met fairly. Her grave, beautiful face seemed, for that instant, a nobler challenge to his manhood. It offered nothing. It asked a great deal first. That given, it might give much, it might give. . . . He paused in his thought to ask what it might give. The answer rang in his head. Wisdom. The word for an instant took on a significance of beauty. Wisdom. The new thing in the world. The topmost apple, the key, the flower. Wisdom. The something which has never been, ruling at last in life. Life, even London life, even country-town life, suddenly beautiful, a flower of praise, glowing. Then, the next moment, came the thought that wisdom loses half her power by coming in a modest form. Wisdom is less attractive than that half of her called Beauty. Men will follow nothing which promises no intoxication. Wisdom cannot be so very wise after all, or, womanlike, she would preserve that attraction, that fillip to the blood, to make men seek her. He thought how many fine women must lose nine-tenths of their power from their scorn of using the tenth. All the thoughts passed quickly. She was saying something in a voice which rang somehow with

an inner nervousness. Something about the ring of footsteps on the paving having a "disembodied" sound, as the echoes robbed the original noise of definiteness, and sent the ghosts of footsteps clapping along the walls on all four sides of the court. He agreed, wondering what their talk was to be, when they sat at his fireside. He was judging her as not attractive, as having consciously put from her that quality, so subtle-sweet, which makes man Dante or Tom Jones at the woman's will. In the gloom of the passage, at the foot of the stairs, so murderous in their twilight of bad gas, she paused for an instant to gather her skirts about her. The grace of the bent head, the femininity of the act, and the faint perfume shaken from the garment, touched him again with the longing that she were that other, longing that was almost persuasion that she was that other. He looked at her tenderly as she climbed the stairs. Her dress rustled. The faint gracious perfume seemed a part of her, as much her as her mind, an emanation from her. Sharply it came to him that she was not that other. They were climbing to his rooms to talk business, to dispel, with business, some of the images of that other, which were still beautiful where she had haunted, only a few hours before. And youth, the beautiful thing, dies in a day, and never returns. And business had had him in her clutch, ever since that day in India, when he was only eighteen. He had never been young. He had never known youth, never known beauty, never known love. And what were power, and a knowledge of some of the lies of life, to the face in the dark, the blinding of the loosed hair, the murmur, the touch, the glow, the fires of extinction in communion. That was life. At present he was getting old, going up ill-lit stone stairs to talk business, in a world which doesn't come again to any of the sons of Adam.

At the top of the stairs, outside his door, she waited

for him, her head thrown back a little, looking at him with a regard which saw enough of him to be maternal. She was thinking that if this fine young man had been her son, she would have given him a more real gentleness. She would have sacrificed even some of the mind to that. He was too selfish, not from any desire for self-indulgence, but from a never-checked leaning towards the pitiless in thought. She felt a pity for him. Life must have been stern to him. Life had been womanless to him. There had been nothing in his life to make him think of others. She had a sad surmise that marriage would be something for which his life had not prepared him. She felt, as he searched his pockets for his key, muttering in pretended wrath, that he had made himself a Compleat Bachelor, and that the awakening from that state, into that of commencing husband, would be painful to those near him. In selfishness and generosity are all the potential tragedies. Capacity for enjoyment is often mistaken for generosity by its possessors. His selfishness was unsuspected by him. She had always felt a tenderness towards him. He had charm. It was about him. It was curiously in his hands. It was in the poise of his head when he turned to speak. Some movements of the charming are like caresses. The beauty of the lower part of his face, the mouth and chin, was marred by his scar. But there was always that engaging enigmatic smile. It was a charming clever face, in spite of the scar. The tan and the heat puckers gave it manliness. It was only when one came to talk intimately with Lionel that one touched that vein of pitilessness which kept him from growing up. She ran over in her mind some of the women who might bring him to something finer, giving his will gentleness, and his mind sympathy. Knowledge of what she meant to say to him clashed for a moment in her mind with the question whether it were

not a man's task, whether this fine steel intellect were not better crossed with a weapon of the same temper. He opened the door. The flat smelt of paraffin.

"The lamp's smoking," said Lionel. "I say. I say." He opened the sitting-room door for her. The lamp was smoking from a blackened spire in which flame gleamed. He advanced swiftly and put it out, then lit the candles on the mantelpiece. He opened the windows. Filaments floated elusively. Mrs. Drummond was acutely conscious of black oily threads on the books on the table. The smoke volleyed and showered down in its effort to roll out. It took on the movements of horses at a gate. Rolls of it backed and passaged while others spurring up, paused, baulked, or took it. At times there was a general swerving, a plunging of heads and drawing back, before the rear of the cavalry forced the front to re-form.

"Lamps are," said Lionel. "We'll open all the doors. That'll make a draught. We'll go out and sit on the stairs a minute, till it clears."

"Is your manageress gone for the day?" she asked.

"Mrs. Holder? Yes." She was thinking of the cheerlessness of bachelor life, and of the possible rashness with which a young man, no longer fully occupied with work, would make his escape from it. He brought out chairs. They sat on the landing together.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" he asked. "Is it anything you can say here, or will you wait till we can go in?"

"Am I keeping you?" she asked. "Keeping you from work?"

"No," he said. "I never work now, because in a sense I'm always working. Aren't you cold here, though?" In his mind he was tucking a rug round Rhoda, taking thanks from her eyes. Somehow the

longing that she were Rhoda gave him a glow of gentleness towards her, as though she were truly she.

"Wait here, will you?" he asked. "I'll get a duster and clean up for you. The room'll be so filthy."

"Let me help you," she said. "Men are no good at cleaning up."

"Aren't they?" he answered, turning to rend her. "You should have seen my ward at Travancore. Dirt. Men'll make war on dirt where women won't even go. You know, Mrs. Drummond, all this talk of women is unphilosophic. Women are human beings just like men, exactly like, except that their own silly folly has made them less healthy as animals. And as they're like men in big things, so they're like them in little. And the essence of the human being is that he won't do anything unless he can get something by it. The something women want to get is a personal something, a man's good opinion, or a finger (or both hands) in the pie of a man's life. And a dainty dish they make of said pie when they succeed. Men are much less selfish than women, and therefore much less clear about what they want. But the thing men want is a social something." By this time he was routing in what he called the boatswain's locker, in which Mrs. Holder kept her dusters.

"I don't believe," he concluded lamely, "in this sentiment about women. Women are as much human beings and as much wild beasts as men. They ought to be treated as such. Here's a duster . . . good. All this rot about chivalry degrades you."

"Chivalry or 'rot about chivalry'?" she asked, taking her allotted duster. They began work upon the table.

"I don't see that it matters one way or the other," he answered. "One is a name for humbug and the other is humbug itself. Good lord, if I were a woman,

I'd box the ears of any man who offered to take me down to dinner. I say. Don't you do this. You'll get as black as a sweep. Besides, it's my chore." He finished the dusting and led the way to his bathroom, where they heated water, and shared it. Mrs. Drummond was a frank comrade. She chaffed him about his rough man's towels which were like strigils to the flesh. He felt the charm of her comradeship, making the shrewd, characteristic mental note that she must have been much with men. The momentary lifting of her gravity made him feel the depth of the hidden character. He looked at her with quicker interest. What had given her that tragic beauty: that look of fathomless gentleness? Surely not Drummond alone. Life had meant much to her. Life had hurt her and been a joy. Fire had burnt in her, fire had burnt her. He was sensible that he was in the presence of some one very rare, very fine. But she was an intellect, he felt, that finest thing, an intellect in a woman's shape. He looked forward to his grappling with that. But, curiously, as will happen to a man in love, things in her face, tones in her voice, sharpened in his mind the memory of Rhoda's face and voice, perhaps by contrast, perhaps by some subtler, stronger faculty of imagination. The memory of Rhoda came back in a gush of mental pleasure. He would have been glad to sit alone all night brooding on that memory. Alone. Solitude is rarely a joy: but when the mind desires solitude the desire is a passion, and the delight of it, when granted, ecstasy. There are secret thoughts which cannot become people in the mind till the world is away. All the talk and routine of the world, all the things of the world which are so much less real than the mind's things, how they can obscure and madden the inner vision. All this talk and all this fever. One can be with Christ in Paradise merely by a closing of the eyes. Many beauties masquerade as that. Looking

back on a life of hungers, so much wears the mask of the Desired. Now a woman, now a post, now money, anon merely physical bread, anon some passion for understanding. The wants are the soul expressed. One must be careful. Careful indeed; for a want is made by all the energy of the soul. It is the one thing terribly alive. No man can gauge the spiritual force of a want. But he or she who truly wants, sends out into the universe a greedy, aching thing, something ruthless and untamed, which can enter into people's hearts. And after walking the world, shaping men's lives to its end, the want fulfils itself, strangely sometimes, sometimes tragically, but fully. There is no real want ever sent out into the world but fulfils itself, working in the dark, perhaps long after its maker has remade life. Perhaps at a time when the fulfilment is a hell. All fulfilment is hell to some one. But the fulfilment comes. In this mystery of life, which shows itself more strange and more beautiful each day, man should be careful of so great spiritual strength. And having received a grace, let each think of old longings, and welcome the gifts they bring. Our past brings gifts to us daily. All this joy and agony. And you who sit at desks, at the alchemy which is never out of date, bringing forth number and measure out of the changing, changeless matter from which the alchemist makes gold, a crumb in a generation, for the universe to share, take heed that your wants, your reachings and strainings to create life, or an accepted shadow of life, bring to you, in the world of men and women, only the noble and the beautiful. Man cannot sow in vain. He who sows reaps. From a want, fulfilment. From an image, reality. According to the seed sown.

They settled into chairs at opposite sides of the fire. He smiled at her. She smiled.

"You wanted to speak to me?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "But I'm not sure, after all, that I will say what I was going to say. Instead, I'll ask you something, a favour. I share a cottage at Coln St. Michael with Kitty Minot. You'll know her water-colours I expect?"

"A hill in the rain, with gorse bushes, and the gorse in blossom?"

"Gorse always *is* in blossom."

"Well. That's the sort of thing she does. I remember her picture. What was it called, 'A Squelching Day'? A very moist picture. All wet heath and rain pools."

"Yes. That's the sort of thing," she said.

"I liked the picture," said Lionel, "because it was so jolly wet."

"What I was going to suggest," she said, still smiling, "was this. Could you come down to Coln St. Michael this week-end. We could have a quiet talk then, in the country."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm engaged."

"Next week?"

He shook his head. He was hoping to spend that Sunday with Rhoda.

"The week after, then?"

"Thank you," he said. "Yes. The week after, I shall be delighted." Rhoda was to be in Shropshire that week. She had talked of it that afternoon.

"That will be very nice," said Mrs. Drummond. "One can talk better in the country." She paused with that momentary access of shyness which checks so many beginning intimacies. It comes with a sudden consciousness of possible mental attitudes towards the hitherto accepted. It comes to remind the forgetting of the mesh of sex, which is about us always, ready to trip, whenever the pulse quickens. Some such consciousness made her suddenly shy now. It gave a

constraint to her voice. She was realising what it was that she wished to say to him, and how intensely personal and intimate their talk would be. No woman needs to be reminded of the danger of stirring a man's soul. Life is darkened by funerals of friendship, those shuttings of the door upon the good because the perfect may not be. Men should be as scrupulous in friendship as in love. They should set the standard high up on the peaks, in the sun. Every failure in the friendship between man and woman lowers the currency of intimacy between the world's two halves. Every such lowering makes the understanding harder, the beautiful thing more difficult. Humanity was cursed indeed by that first mandate to "be fruitful and multiply." The second mandate, "to replenish the earth, and subdue it," still waits man's liberation from the first.

"There is much I want to say to you," she said. She was standing by the mantelpiece, not looking at him. Her hand lifted and put back the little Indian silver objects on the tray. She sensed that the emotion in her voice made him sympathetic.

"Much," she went on, "which I should find it hard to say here. You realise, I think, how hard it is for a woman to make any sort of intimate appeal to a man, or even to speak to him of things which may mean much to her. You know, Mr. Heseltine, you are not quite a stranger to me. We met years ago. On a day which was rather beautiful to me. And I would like some day to talk to you about your mother, who was a very rare person. But it is not about personal matters that I want most to talk to you. Though life is made up of them, in a way. The big is so bound up with the little. I want to have leave to speak to you, as the counsel for all that side of life to which you have turned your back. You know, probably, that you have a terrible power. Intellectual power knows itself. Emotional power very

rarely does. You have the power—I don't say this to flatter you, but to frighten you—you have the power to destroy a great deal which you value more than you think. At the bottom of your heart, you care a good deal. I would like to say to you, this:—Life is so very much more than a handling of affairs. So very much more even than the destruction of personal enemies and antipathies. There is a danger of your sacrificing much that ought to be precious to you (and yet will be precious to you, when it is too late, perhaps), to that great machine which you have the power—the wonderful power—of building. You see, Mr. Heseltine, I'm speaking to you now as a woman very rarely does speak to any man not intimately tied to her. I did not mean to speak. But I have come to realise your power."

She paused. He was listening sympathetically. One's self is a pleasant text; much may be said upon it. He was trying to cross her subject to her object. The spiritually minded interested and puzzled him. He guessed the coming of criticism and an appeal. Prayer was distasteful to him. "In a civilised community," he thought, "prayer of all kinds is an impotence of the will to do. The only prayer to be regarded is the hour's creative thought before action." A smile moved upon his lips. It was the smile of a schoolboy who has done some wrong of which the cleverness exceeds the sin. It was more expressive of something unripened in his nature than many speeches.

"I like you for speaking," he said. Swiftly with all the rare gentle charm which he kept so strictly from the world, he added, "Dear woman." It was gently said. It was his tribute to something genuinely felt.

"You are like your mother sometimes," she answered. She paused; much touched. There was something very like his mother in that eager, quick look. There was something feminine in his grace and in the beauty

of his deference. When he liked his friend, his manners were the fine manners of a woman, beautiful to watch, delicate with tact. Seeing this side of him made her knowledge of the other side more painful.

"You have got rid of your Correggio," she said.

"Yes," he said. He smiled his schoolboy smile. To have triumphed over a crafty intellect at watch to cheat him, was pleasant. The success of that intricate game, played out upon men's minds, almost like war, was flattering. He regretted the loss of the picture, now and then. It had suited his liking for distinction. The red chalk drawing by Alfred Stevens, which hung in its place, did not come home so strongly, did not rest him, did not attract him. The Heseltine Correggio had given a majesty to life. Being gone, it gave the power to control life, a responsibility, not a grace.

"Yes," he went on. "Did you hear about that? I haven't seen you, have I? Or did I tell you? There was much in that negotiation which was not told."

"You triumphed, I believe?"

"I protected myself. They behaved shamefully about it. They are a generation of vipers. I was inclined to say, 'The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the Lord lighteneth both their eyes.' The brazenness of them. They are. They really are. I didn't feel afraid for England till I had that deal with them. Machiavelli. I don't know that I mind people being Machiavelli. One has to be that to live when brains reach a certain pitch of sharpness. Machiavelli as a thief I can circumvent. But Machiavelli as a pew-opener, that is what those people are. Pew-openers to the rich. I told them so. I heard young Lazarus say something under his breath about my being an æstnète. It was his way of assuring himself of Jahveh's ultimate help."

Mrs. Drummond smiled sadly. "Mr. Heseltine,"

she asked. "I would like to ask you another question. Have you started a paper?"

He looked at her, searching her face. He wore a mask of schoolboy humour impossible to pierce.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes. I'm starting a paper. But I'd rather that shouldn't be known." A sense of the beauty of the colour in her face gave his words a tenderness.

"That must be between ourselves," he said. He paused for an instant. "Are you sure that you won't have your talk with me now?" he asked. "You have a look of being about to be very merciful."

"No," she answered. "I've planned it all out now, exactly where we'll talk. The stile we'll sit on, and what we shall see. People ought to be more careful of the places where they talk important things. Life is very much an art. Women know that better than men, perhaps. One ought to do everything 'as perfectly as God made the world.'"

"That's not very perfect," he put in.

"Well, then, as perfectly as women would like to make the world. One ought to arrange all things, meetings, talks, even ordinary talks, so that they may be perfect memories. If I were a man engaged in business I would make business a fine art, by bringing an intense thought to the method. So when you come to Coln St. Michael, Mr. Heseltine, you must try to catch the perfect memory. Even if we disagree." She stood up and set her veil, becoming twenty years younger. "Of course, no mirror," she said, smiling. He helped her with her coat. Somehow the fragrance of the coat, fragrant even in London, where the air taints all things with the smells of the stable or the garage, was delicate to him, like the touch of something feminine. He felt rather more than the critic in her. She was a charming woman, not only the woman's intel-

lect. "Women give you back your own thought, in long clothes," he thought. Her gloved hand was warm in his for a second.

"I've done something wrong, and you're not pleased," he said.

"Don't think that," she said. "But come to Coln St. Michael the week after next."

"I shall look forward to our talk," he said.

"You're very like your mother," she said, quickly, catching a momentary likeness from an accident of light or gesture. "She had just your eyes."

"I'm not really like," he answered. "This is mother. Here." He showed a photograph. She looked at it with a hungriness of interest which made him wonder.

"I wonder how much of her personality was sown in you," she said. "I believe that that is the only certain crop in this world. Personality. You plant your entire self in a human heart. It costs a good deal to do that. And you get a crop, in time. Or the world does."

"I'm keeping you standing," he said. She faced him, as he thrust the chair towards her. The sadness in her face was a beauty the more. It came from the high things of life. She might have spoken to him then, into a mind moved to hear her; but she would not. She knew that his intellect would suspect an emotional appeal, not at once, perhaps, but afterwards, when she had gone. She would not let him think that she used the old weapons of woman.

"I don't believe in giving the personality to another," he said, wondering, a little wearily, if it were all to begin again. "It's one of the mistakes of life for which women are responsible. Why should one give the personality to another? There is all this talk of the selfishness of man. The selfishness and jealousy of women are what keep the world where it is. Personality

is rare. It is a genius for life, as rare as the other forms of genius. Personality belongs to the world. If you plant your personality anywhere, you ought to plant it in the world. Certainly not in any single individual. Custom decrees that where personality exists it may pass into the power of an individual, into the merciless, unthinking power of a woman. I don't suppose that there has been a single generous impulse towards the bettering of the world, which the selfishness of woman has not tried to strangle."

"And the imposing of the mother's personality on the child?"

"Most mothers have no more personality than would suffice a bun. I would make it a criminal offence for most mothers to attempt any such thing. Certain things have been proved to be of use in the world. Hardness. Truth. Keenness and quickness of mind. Indifference to pleasure. Honesty and energy in work. Hatred of dirt in all its forms. Loathing of idleness in all its forms. Belief in the power of man to perfect life. Those things can be taught and should be taught. I believe that they can be best taught by men. You can't get them from the average mother. They aren't in her. The world has gone steadily downhill in all the manly qualities since the 'mother's personality' became what is called 'a factor in education.'" He shook his head and smiled at her. "No. It's no good, Mrs. Drummond," he said. "You won't persuade me. The average mother is as unfit to control life as the average man is to create it, or to live it. No. Women must be one of two things, just like men. They must be comrades or servants. At present, they're saying they won't be servants. I'm very glad. But they can't be equals until they learn, what men have always known, that some of the claims they make upon personality degrade life, and always have degraded it."

"Men make certain claims, too," she answered, "which degrade life unspeakably."

"Momentary claims."

"That is the degradation."

There was a noise at the door. Letters were being forced through the slit with the fumbling, scraping noise, which always set Mrs. Drummond's teeth on edge.

"The last post," he said. She moved to the door, as the letters fell with a thump on the door-mat. The clatter of the postman's feet died away upon the stairs. They heard the harder ring of his feet upon the Court.

"Are we to choose between two degradations?" he asked.

"Between sense and sentiment."

"Ought you to be standing?" he asked. They were in the dim hall. She was there, close to him, a fragrance and a greyness. In the vagueness of the face, made vague by hat and veil, he saw her eyes. It came to him, that it was rather wonderful to be there on those terms with such a woman.

"I ought to be on my way," she answered.

"I'll see you to the station," he said.

"That will be very kind."

"Thank you for not pretending."

"One hears such tales of monasteries," she retorted.

"All invented by the monks to attract novices," he said wearily. "You should see the monks by daylight." He groped for his hat and coat, but turned to her before he had taken them.

"I want you to talk to me at Coln St. Michael," he said.

"I will."

He took her hand in both his. "Good-bye, dear woman," he said. "Bless you for coming to see me." She was touched, and a little shaken. She went out quickly, and down the stairs. He caught her at the

doorway. She was still not quite herself. Something in him had reminded her suddenly, and poignantly, in her very soul, of the day which had been marvellous to her years before. His voice was like the dead speaking. Old words were spoken again. Out of her brain came the past. Roses of an old summer were many on a wall. The sun was hot. The drenched grass sparkled. The bees murmured up and down, up and down, in the drowsy air, warm with scent. The hum of many invisible wings droned, as though the air, warm, sweet, heavy with life, were singing the song of her content. She was a girl again, with a lift in the blood which made her soul sing. Many were in the garden with her. Women like moving flowers, men like the knights of youth. They laughed in the sun, they moved like laughter, there was laughter in life that day of days. The blackbirds laughed, startling from the gooseberry bushes. In the glow of light, mellow on a path, one sensed the unrest of Pan from the perfectness of the beauty.

Some one had laughed, coming down the path. There before her, in a white dress, with little touches of green, was the laughing beautiful mother of this young man, and the little boy himself, hardly four years old then. That had been twenty-six years ago. They had had to travel far before they met again. And now they had met.

Sharply the old pain wrung her. When that now long silent laughter had sounded she was standing at the golden door with her beautiful strong love. Life had just come to her. Love had just come to her. There in the garden by the pond, where the dragonflies darted, gleams of blue flash poised quivering, under a rain of Kalmia blossom, she had given her heart and mind and mouth, in a throb of the blood, in a glow, in a cry, in an ecstasy. It had all passed and become new. Earth and sky had turned gold, and

faded and fallen. Then there had been nothing but the universal song, the droning in the air, Pan at his pipes in the beck. It had been music, music, music. Life and the blood surging into music. Life rising to a note of music to sing in the heart of the beloved.

It was marvellous that this young man should be a part of that memory, that he should have seen her then, five minutes after the ecstasy, after the sacrament, while her cheeks still burned from the kiss. He was the first person to whom she had spoken after that supreme thing. She had bent to speak to him, lest her friend, his mother, should see the rapture in her. There had been need for secrecy. She had bent to speak, and the beautiful strong love had bent to speak. She saw him stooping in the sun, and the little boy's blue eyes, and the radiant young mother who laughed. Some day she must tell him all this. She must ask him. She must perfect that memory. People still alive had been there. They might tell her more. Add a warmer gold to the light, strew the ground with another petal, send one more gracious presence laughing across the grass. That had been her perfect day. In the days of agony which followed, that day had been something white, something shining, to keep precious, to keep against the soul. She would talk to him at Coln St. Michael. She was in such a tumult of the past, the dead knocked so loudly, pressed her so close, walking there, in the cold lane, that she could not speak. He was unconscious of her thoughts. He had never been further from her mood, though he had never seemed so near to her. Walking beside her, he was all that marvellous day to her. He was petulant with the sense that the conventions of life had made an anti-climax, a break of mood. He was thinking that the world is a conspiracy to prevent intimacy between two souls, and that the conspiracy gets more powerful

daily, as the souls grow older. As he ran from her the few steps to drop his letter in the box the jostle of the Strand annoyed him. Glancing at Mrs. Drummond as they turned down Norfolk Street, he saw her eyes fixed upon his face with the strange seriousness which had puzzled him once before that evening. She smiled, seeing the wonder in his face.

"Let's look back a moment," she said, quickly, "at that great hill of flats in Clements Inn. I used to come here often three or four years ago, to see Mrs. Allison. I used always to look back from here. She lived right at the top. You see that one yellow eye at the top? That was where she lived. I used to feel that I was in an eyrie there. It made me remember the lives when I was a bird. A rook in the elms, high up, swaying in the wind. It must be life to be a rook in a nest on a south-westerly day, when the cumulus bowls along above."

"I like any big thing which comes from thought," he said, looking at the flats. He paused searching for a simile. "It's a great big skull of something, watching the night with its eyes. I like a top flat. So you knew Mrs. Allison? I went to see her play, the night before I sailed for India twelve years ago. London's an uncanny place at night."

"Its uncanniness is a fever to weak nerves. Don't you feel that all this great external thing, the noise, and the lights, and the crowd, and great uncanny crags of building, with gleaming eyes like that, is something to be absorbed and dominated before the mind can be free to brood on life? Life is her proper subject."

"Yes," he said. "All this is the lust of the eye and the pride of life. And it's too big. There's nothing bigger near by. One can't think in London. There's no corrective. No mountains, no noble natural thing. The river's bridged out of grandeur. There's nothing

but what you call a crag of building to remind you that you're part of the scheme, and a small part, not the scheme itself. And that only adds to man's rotten pride. He can build a thing like that out of a world which provides only clay and stone, in the worst possible condition for the purpose. And man builds a house like that . . . and there . . . You see? That drunken woman offering to sell herself . . . and that broken-down, limping wild beast in the rags. Look at his face. Good God, what a face! Man hasn't built that up out of the mud. Good God, man cares less for life than for the stones he hides in. Let's come away. Let's come away. I can't face London faces. Faces which know nothing and care nothing and are nothing. I wish some god with a spoon would give the cauldron a stir and pash the dregs into the sea." His vehemence made her turn to walk on as he asked. She watched him curiously, liking him the better for the fervour of his devotion to life. He moved away hurriedly; his lips muttered; his head hung; she could see the knitting of his brows. His face wore the look of tortured nervous sensitiveness which so often made her fear for him. That look warns of coming breakdown or outbreak. What she feared for him was surrender to a momentary goading to recklessness. This fear put her again in the maternal relation to him. The past pressed less closely round her. She realised the present. She was walking with a young man in a London street. The young man was in a dangerous frame of mind.

"Fort, Schmeissfliegen, fort," she quoted.

"What were you saying?" he asked.

"A literary quotation," she answered. "A German evocation to drive fools out of a circle."

"Schmeissfliegen," he repeated. "If they were fools their own folly would destroy them. But they aren't. They're that. If one could destroy the fly, Mrs. Drum-

mond. Dead flies make the ointment of the apothecary to . . . But live flies. With every tiny foot clogged with pestilence. Little tiny death on wings. Plague's swan shot. Mrs. Drummond, I'm afraid of flies. I shudder when I think what a fly is." It struck her as the remark of one nervously strained. She, too, had known moods in which the grasshopper was a burden. She thought it strange that her mind, a few minutes before, had been full of the drone and drowse of flies, little glittering flies, gold-dust on the wings of summer. Now they were death's seed sowing.

"Mr. Heseltine," she said. "I want to know what you paid for doing that work in Africa. What you say about shuddering makes me afraid that you paid a great deal in nervous strain. Are you suffering at all from Africa?"

"Oh, no," he answered. "One pays part of oneself everywhere, for anything. The tropics plant an ambush in a man, of course. I'll know about that later. But I'm all right at present. London's nervous work. Getting anything done is nervous work. But getting anything done in London. Well. Martyrdom is the only thing likely to make Paradise endurable." He smiled at his cynicism, while he watched for a break in the traffic. They crossed to the station stairs.

"Are you going to come to dine with me on Tuesday?" she asked.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks. But . . . Tuesday?" he asked. "Tuesday? Now am I free on Tuesday? Look here. I'll write. We must meet and talk." His face had the look of one who suddenly remembers something. She would not keep him longer. "Come if you can then," she said. "Half-past seven." She gave her hand.

"Thank you so much for coming with me," she said. "Good-bye. You'll write about Tuesday?" Looking

at him with the earnest look which seemed to concentrate her nature in her eyes, she wondered if the crisis were already on him, if the strain were already severe enough to make him seek for solace. Something in his face, in his manner. . . . Sitting in the train, her mind travelled along the lit streets of his mind, looking into the faces of the women. She knew so many of the women. There were many noble, gentle women in the Hamlin set. Some among them would make that nature of his so fine. Sighing, a little uneasily, she told herself that he would not seem good enough to one of those women. And in his present mood, he would think their fineness merely the old maid's scruples which make women's minds like linen presses. She remembered something which Mr. Naldrett had said to her, that thoughts, or at any rate moods of thought, are persons in the eternal kingdom, who have their living correspondents in the world of men, and that a man's thought or mood of thought, comes to him always with its physical companion. She wondered whether his mood of unscrupulous intellectual attack, which destroyed, morally, so much, in the effort to create materially, would bring to his life the temptress whose colour would complete the ruin. The train passed from station to station. It was like life. People got in and out. There was a jostle. People got in and out continually. Nobody looked to see if the engine-driver were God or a lunatic. Nobody asked if his neighbour were in need of help. The great, clanging, roaring ingenuity whirled in bright light under the cellars of a city.

In the quiet of her flat, she drew up her chair to the fire. She sat for a long time thinking of him, travelling in those streets of his mind which her imagination had the power to light. Thinking of him as a dear boy who had somehow gone all astray, she peered into courts and

alleys, little black, crooked ways, secret as the night, beautiful polite squares, classic avenues. Wandering in his mind thus she realised what it was which his city wanted. It was dusty. The sun had parched it. It was waterless, always had been waterless. There was a want of the waters of emotion. No fountain played there. No green thing grew there. Only the ghosts of trees, sentinel above unsown corn. Out of that city an army of the motherless was marching to the war. She sat on, over the fire, leaning an elbow on her knee, wondering what she could do for him.

Meanwhile, Lionel, in his loneliness, built up from memory the beauty who had laughed there some hours before. The scent of violets lingered about the chair where her coat had lain. The twisted paper in his hand smelt slightly of lavender. The mingling of the perfumes stirred him. He kissed the note. Then for a long time he walked up and down, up and down, staring at her photograph. He tried to think, but could not. Rhoda in the colour of her youth laughed in his brain at each trial. He went to bed at last, wondering how the time would pass till Sunday. Sitting up in bed, staring at the window, he thought bitterly as many lovers have thought, that Sunday would soon come, far away as it seemed. What was worse, it would very soon be gone; very soon. And the knowledge that it would soon be gone, joy and all, left him wondering if it were not better to hug the present. Friday night and hope were surely better than Sunday night and memory. Why long for the already doomed? The world has gone on for all these years longing for to-morrow. To-morrow has never failed the world. To-morrow comes but too surely. To-morrow we shall know. To-morrow we shall see. Ah, to-morrow the dust will be over us. We shall be a cry in the wind, a little shaking of the leaves.

CHAPTER X

THERE are many graves in Pudsey churchyard. All the thirty generations of Pudsey lie there. The ground there is the dust of man. Some of the graves have headstones dated as far back as 1720. The well-cut stones of those days attest the virtue of their cutters. Looking at the sharp, Roman capitals one sighs more for the hand which could obey the brain than for the Kirks, Heywoods, and Dents, "yeomen of this parish" whose piety the lost art commemorates. Some of the graves are mounds of turf. Others have wooden head-boards. Some are barred with iron, or heaped with flags, to keep the corpse within. On several, the local fancy has raised erections of stone, like great sea-chests, with swags instead of shackles. As on sea-chests, the name of the occupant of the tomb is placed upon the side. The lids are graven with the names of those who were buried beneath them after the first interment. Only one grave need detain us. It stands to the south of the church, at the brink of the slope which leads down to Heywood's farm. It is the tomb of a farmer who once farmed the Hazel farm, the home of which, an Elizabethan building, stands south-west from the church. As for the farm, the man made most of it himself, ploughed it up from the waste, drained it, planted the boggy bit with sallow, got good from it, made it obey him. That little bit of the world has been the better for his virtue ever since. The man himself is forgotten locally. He was a great singer in the church on Sunday. He liked his ale of a morning; drank a good quart of it daily, at breakfast; drank a good deal more of it during the day, especially at harvest time. He used to invite young men to thump him on the chest,

so that he might show them his toughness. He was fond of wallflowers. The garden of his farm to this day grows a strange striped wallflower. It is descended from one of those kinds which grew all about the place in his time. You do not see it anywhere else. The wife of the present tenant of the Hazel calls it rhubarb tart. It has a strange blossom, reddish-whitish, like a mixture of blood and milk. It has spread since his day. It has got into the walls, with the valerian; picturesque, but untidy. He could never abide weeds in the walls. "Like rust on iron," he used to say. "It picks the walls to pieces." He had a crab-tree kind of a face, stood about five feet four: but very broad: rode twelve stone, and could lift a pocket of hops. Washed under the pump in the yard in all weathers. Was much attached to his dog Howker. Had an old nag named Bleacher. Rode him for nineteen years, on all market and fair days. Didn't get on with his son towards the end of his life, son John being wayward, a weak slip tokened to his mother. Stood up to Squire and Parson about Pudsey Common. "Pudsey Common has been the making of 'em (the villagers). And it be'nt Christian to take the 'eritage of the poor, law or no law, and so you ought to know." He saved the Common from enclosure. The present villagers, who feed their geese on the Common, many a fat gaggle ("eightpence a pound for a Pudsey goose" is a well-known proverb of those parts) have, as I have said, forgotten him, forgotten his style. The part of the Common nearest to the church was dangerous bog in Dent's day. John Dent's style came out at that end of the Common. He planned the cuts which drained it. He got the Commoners to put in with him in the task of cutting. It was called Pudsey Swallow before John Dent came along. They found men in it, cows, horses, when they came to drain it. Bits of the men's clothes are to be

seen at The Hall, the residence of Sir Borman Fuster, among the trees there. Sir Borman is pleased to show them on week-days on production of your card. Very coarse cloth, seemingly like sacking. It dates from the eighteenth century, according to the experts. One of the men (there were three in all, in different parts of the Swallow) had a wound on the head. There is a passage about it in the *Western Counties Guide*, from the pen of the Rev. W. Bodger, incumbent of Cington Magna. The reverend gentleman takes a romantic view of the circumstance. "What dark deed may we not surmise?" He preached about it once (from Ecclesiastes ix. 12), in aid of the Pudsey War Memorial, a great day to the reverend gentleman, all due to Dent. The aforesaid guide-book has an interesting note about Cington. "Cington is said to be as much as to say Cygne-ton, the 'ton' or town of Swans, there being a swannery in the lake here, vide *The Court Rolls for the Manor of Cington cum Arbrefield* (edited in 1881, by Miss Anna Vernon), where 'cygnes' are mentioned as a part of the dues of Robert Hart and Will Eype, whose 'ffarmes' were adjacent to the said lake." There are no swans now. Mad Squire Fuster, the present baronet's great grandfather, killed the last of them at a dinner party, the famous Drunken Dinner of which you will all have heard. It remains a monument of man's capacity in the port wine way. They still talk of it, at times, in the tap. Local phantasy has corrupted the text from "bottles" to "barrels," a natural error, but confusing, at first, to the believer in human progress. There were thirteen present at the dinner. They called themselves the Blazes Club. Sad dogs all of them: but beat not the bones of the buried. They have put twinges in the bones of some three hundred descendants, twinging enough for one world without thwacking the dead. Their favourite ditty—

"We'll be damnable mouldy a hundred years hence"—

made a century too long a time for them by some ninety years. All this, of course, is a wandering from the swans. The mad squire killed them in the hope that they might sing. He had heard of swans singing before they died. He and his club hoped for some "awful, jubilant note," strong enough to get through the wine fumes to the brain. "Cruel," John Dent called it. There were traces of the Radical in honest John. But enough of the swans.

John Dent lived at his farm in his manful crab-tree way. Going out night after night to his front door "to look at the night" he had the west before him, still with the glow upon it, and a planet in the glow. Rising with the sun to his work he had the dawn with the trees against it, morning after morning. His wall-flowers were very sweet there in the spring. Summer brought the increase, autumn the enjoyment. Winter brought the winter nights, when work stopped early, when the beasts steamed in the byres, and the grass crisped under foot. He had good health. He got joy of the earth in a dumb way, was glad of it; gave God thanks for it, fervent in prayer of a Sunday. He had a fear late in life, that our King hadn't done the right thing by Boney. It troubled him. Speaking out in prayer one night, as was the custom, all the farm folk present, he hoped God would forgive and turn the hearts of those who had chosen war when peace offered. This was thought very strong speaking about people like the King's ministers. We must remember that it was late in life, when son John had become a thorn. He had been worried into a pestilent way of thinking. A word of son John. Son John joined the Southern Counties Fencibles in the year of the scare. He was always a weak slip. He tokened his mother, one of the Rackets of Cington, warm people, but weak in doctrine as was always thought. He was eighteen when he joined the

Fencibles. He had an ensigncy. His regiment was quartered at Arundel. His men cut rather a figure there, in that small place. It was the ruin of him. What with the drink and his red coat, and a sort of red and white good looks he had (Molly Racket went the same way with young Squire Springal) he took up with a girl at the Duke of Granby. She got into trouble by him. There was scandal about it. The girl came to be hanged for murdering her child. Delivered in a barn, poor girl, quite alone, at midnight. God knows what she endured, poor child. She was not nineteen at the time. Very proud, she'd always been, they said, till she met son John. She left her child on the ground, and walked a mile and a half in the dark. Collapsed on some stones by the road there; you pass the place coming from Cross Bush. There were no marks on the child. The doctor tried to bring it in she was *non compos*. But the Judge said her walking straight along the road to Arundel was a sign she walked with "intention." An unmarried man the Judge. His affair with Lady Swift was notorious. There was a ballad on Lady Swift. "It is hard to *swallow* that your son is Swift." The *paronomasia* was much admired in eighteen hundred and war time. We were a manly race in those days. We could speak out. So they hanged the girl outside the gaol. An ostler at the Duke of Granby offered to make her an honest woman before the birth of her child. But she was always a proud one. She wouldn't marry John for the same reason. It seems John's captain put pressure on him to marry her. But she would not. Girls are like that. If the men care enough, they do not wait till it's a duty. Men cannot grasp the point of view. They don't understand how pride and love go together in a girl. John got very drunk the day of the hanging. He'd left the Fencibles. Old John Dent passed the night in the gaol, bringing the

girl to grace. His mother, Martha Dent, young John's granny, a pious woman, then eighty-five, was with him in the cell.

That was really the break-up of old John Dent. He came home to the farm a changed man. He never spoke to young John after. Only gloomed at him, hawking in his throat. But the night after he came home he spoke in prayer, all the farm folk present, from Jeremiah i. 18, and ii. 7, 21, 22, and part of 23 (to "know what thou hast done"). It must have been very terrible. It was all the worse from old John being so short. There was a lot of man concentrated into old John. That was the only flaming out men ever saw in old John, but for the stand against Squire about the Enclosure.

Some say that a flaming out empties the heart. They say it is like a bonfire, a burning up of weeds. It wasn't that to old John. He burned inward, in spite of his work. Late on in his life he took to talking to himself. He muttered odd sentences. Walked about repeating things. There is a Latin name for it now. The neighbours called it a Swindging Melancholy. They prescribed things. Ann Dent saw the wise woman of Lidripe about him. A famous creature. Yet all was no good. Not that he failed as a farmer and a Christian. He was up before his men every day, going up, team and all, before dawn. Sunday just the same, in his pew, just below the pulpit, a mighty power in responses. His "Lord grant it," at hopeful points in the sermon, was a thing to mind. But he had this thing preying in him. He was never quite the same. That doubt about Boney is only one instance of many.

Not that it killed him. It lowered him. He died of a squinsy which he got coming home one night from Putsham November fair. In his right health he would have shaken it off, but the heart was out of him. He wasn't ill long, didn't suffer much, was grim to son John

to the end. Parson had a wrestle over old John. Parson was strong in doctrine but weak in good works. Loaves and fishes for Parson. Old John went home manfully. One felt that when he died the man of him walked out to Christ, with a great awe, yet ready to take what was coming. There was a man in old John. A little dark bull of a man. When he went staggering out of the body, into the light, he looked his Redeemer in the eye, and told a straight tale of himself, be sure of that. "Lord, I been a great sinner, but I done my work afore Thee."

He did. The world bears record. The Hazel farm bears record. There is the famous north wall where his pears grew. There is no such wall elsewhere. The wallflower and valerian have got into it now. Moss, lichen, stone-crop, and that little snapdragon of a flower, the most lovely of all the flowers which grow on stone (toad-flax the name of it) have all taken hold upon it. The brick has mellowed to cherry colour, clean and bold, all the brighter for the lichen. There is all John Dent in that wall. It is mere picturesque now, to those of us who look at it. We have ceased to look at things for the quality of honest work in them. Picturesque! Nature creeping in. Old knoppy badly pruned stocks of fruit-trees, with few fruit. Old John would have glowered, hawking in his throat. Then there is the house itself. John left it good for two centuries. The garden wall has been damaged. Some one let the ivy grow on it. A great tod of ivy. Not even the ivy perfect now, for the horses crop it from the meadows, thrusting their heads over. But elsewhere about the place there is an honesty of work and plan which no neglect can efface. The farm is ill-kept now. The garden has a lavender hedge. And everywhere now, on the walls, in the walks, wherever the foot falls, is the wallflower, rhubarb tart, with its reddish-whitish

blossom, like milk and blood. Everywhere there is that perfume of the wallflower. It is the spirit of the place, that perfume. It is in the house, too, for the present tenants make a *pourri* of the flowers. Lavender and wallflower. The secret is known only to themselves. It is very sweet, passing sweet, the odour of the fullness of summer, the essence of the sweetness of earth. It goes about the world, into many houses. The fragrance scents many lives, is a memory to many. It clings to the robes of many women, as they pass across the rooms of life, bringing beauty. Many men cannot pass a wallflower without thinking of the shining one about whom that perfume clings. Some of the sweetness and the romance of many lives come, in a measure, from old John Dent, who lies in Pudsey churchyard.

His tomb is of the sea-chest variety. The inscription (on the southward side) is as follows:—

“Sacred to the memory of John Dent, yeoman, of this parish, who died Oct. 22nd, 1808, aged 46.

“Life is uncertain. Death is so sure.
Sin is the Death. Christ is the cure.”

His widow, Ann Dent, was buried at Cington, where all her people lie. An inscription on the lid of John's sea-chest tells of the other Dents who lie beside him:—

“Also of John Dent, his Son, who departed this life March 16th, 1815, aged 30.

“Also of Bethia Dent, his daughter, who died July 23rd, 1860, aged 72 years, being the last of her family.”

There is a dignity in the last six words which raises Bethia from the grave to us. Pride and an instinct for style, the sense that a tradition died with her, the knowledge that she bowed to a god unknown to the folk

about her. She was precise in her dress, of a graceful, slight figure, rather prim-lipped, but fine, a living re-proof to the farmers round. She never married; never had an offer, some think. She set her heart as a girl on young Squire Rollock, a coming lad, who went and entered the Church. He held the Rollock living for thirty years there (at Cington Parva). Parson Rollock had a great opinion of Miss Bethia. He held that she had (as it was then called) "ideas above her station." Perhaps some words of his spoken one winter night before riding out into the dark, were misunderstood by her. He had had tea with her at the farm. He had come about a girl who had been led astray; a sad case, the man Peters was to blame for it. Pity for the girl gave his words a tenderness. You know how it is, after tea, by the fire on a winter night. It never could have been, of course. Still, Miss Bethia treasured those words. Repeated them every day for many years very likely. He married a Miss Hope of Dover; but was disappointed in her, so people said.

Miss Bethia started a needle-work class in her old age. She was a famous needle-woman. She was bed-ridden at seventy (had a stroke in the garden, driving out the hens from the flower beds). The girls of her needle-class used to come by turns to read the Bible to her, especially the epistles of James and John. She died very quietly, one summer evening, with her face in the light, in her old room at the farm. After her death, it was as in the Scriptures. Her lavender hedge did another snip, and her Orpington hens did another fatten. The farm passed to strangers, weak, decent people, connected with those parts long before, distant relatives. Some of her furniture is there still, her old bureau of books, and a piece of her work. The work represents the light on a peak. One gets an impression from it (perhaps a fanciful one) of something deeper in Miss Bethia's mind,

an impression of an intelligence thrusting upward into Heaven. These religious minds have strange, unsuspected, mystical notions of the kind. Yet critics are often wrong. They read in much which isn't really there. Perhaps we do so here.

The Dents are all gone from the countryside. But they have left their mark upon it. And, like all the other deeds of man, their deeds are still fruitful, still have their influence. One of the deeds of old John Dent had its influence upon Lionel Heseltine. Perhaps, long after you and I are dust, something we have done or said will move unknown people far away, at critical moments of their lives, and be a memory to them, something shining, recalled long after, at the end of everything. Thus it was with one of the deeds of John Dent, who found the Cure of this world's troubles on October 22nd, 1808, aged forty-six.

When John Dent was at his best (say thirty-one or two) he worked the limestone quarry, below Ponton Copse, a little to the north of the homestead. He burned the stone in the kilns up the hill. You can see traces of the kilns even now, especially after frost. The business did not pay, after the first year or two. They had finished the new wing of the Hall by '95. There was not much demand for lime thereabouts when that was finished. John ceased to work the quarry. He left it to nature, who wrought her will upon it. Coltsfoot and burdock took hold of it. The grass soon spread. The rabbits tunnelled the mounds. Brambles choked the paths. Nature is greedy of opportunities to be wasteful. John did not like the looks of it in that untidy state. He thought of making it a garden for Ann and the children. He did some work upon it to that end, but never finished it. He was busy with the job of the Swallow, and Ann liked the place wild. She had romantic notions. He left it a pleasant, grassy hollow,

sown with early bulbs, daffodils, squills, and small scarlet tulips. It is there still, at the south-east end of Ponton Copse. It is a sweet place in the early spring. The wild plants have choked the bulbs, all but the daffodils. The daffodils are there still. And Ann's white violets, toughened by the years, have spread all over the place. In April when the sun is hot, they smell so sweet that the air is drowsy with them. All the April flowers grow there. There are primroses everywhere, among the last year's leaves. Below the spring at the southern end of the quarry, there are marsh-marigolds and cuckoo-flowers. Pale things the cuckoo-flowers. All the April flowers are spiritual. There is something of Easter in the April flowers, something white. Something pale and spiritual runs in Nature in April, a quick thing, a laughter in the blood, a shy thing. Some think that April can only be seen at its most perfect in that old quarry of John's. The smell of the violets, the colour of the primrose, the laughter in the trembling of the trumpets, and the dust of the budding upon the thorn. They are all in the old quarry. And among the rotten stone of the quarry-face, in the parts where rabbits cannot climb to nibble, the farmer's wife or some one dropped in the seeds of the wallflower. It grows all up that quarry face, wherever a chink opens. Valerian is there, too; but the time of the valerian comes later, when the joy has gone out of things. Rhubarb tart flowers early and flowers long. When the sun shines one lies back at ease on the grass there. The blackbirds call. The thrushes call. Spring is in the blood of all the birds of the air. The sun comes warm, drawing out the smell from the violets. The primrose scent comes purely as one lies back. The dead leaves rustle under head. Lying back one sees the fine weather clouds float past, against the branches of the copse. There are catkins in the copse. They waver

and waver. Rabbits creep out to nibble. The bright ribbon of a snake suns on a mole-hill, to flash back, whip-like, to his lair at a step or shadow. Something is in the sun, in the air, in all that beauty of earth unfolding. The rabbits feel it, it is in the grass, in the flowers. It is the will of the things the winter killed forcing the earth to give new bodies to them.

What lies beyond life? Who knows? Perhaps it is the unused will, the unused knowledge, the unused joy, of all the millions dead. "The dead are about us always." Perhaps the air is full of moods in search of flesh to express them. We ought to live in places where the will to live clothes itself in lovely shapes. The good spirits haunt those places, the gentle souls. A place expresses the quality of the spirits which seek life there. Sensitiveness to that quality makes landscape art enduring. Men must not ask of a landscape artist the number of the trees nor the pattern of the colours. They must ask him where to raise the altar to the genius *loci*.

When April was at her loveliest, there came a day of rain. The rain filled the little spring at the southern end of the quarry. The spring bubbled up, stirring the sand-grains with its trembles. It rilled past the rush-clump, past the ooze where the marigolds sucked. With a cluck and colour it slid across a quartz, loitered in bubbles below, bobbed round, curtsied and continued. It rippled away, cleaving through the grasses, in all the perpetual miracle of an April brook. A bramble had fallen across it. It sent it ducking up and down, bright with wet. It drove sodden leaves, and a twig with a lime crust on it, against the bramble. A pool spread, curdling with scum, yeasty near the bramble, like working ale. Then on. Then on. Beyond this it had a glide two feet long to a puddle a yard across. Here it lay clear upon sand brought down by the fall.

Then, slowly, it sucked away over a lip, and quickened, and broke out bubbling. Over a run of pebbles it glugged and tinkled. In the hollow to the east of the farm a ditch drained into it. It spread. It began to hurry. At the corner of the field where the marigolds grow in a quag, the hurry fevered. It made an insistent hurry—hurry—hurry note. It was as though it heard the bigger brook, rushing down there, full from many ditches and the Hall House pool. Down at the corner of the field, in the quag trodden into cups of muddy water by the hoofs of the farm beasts, it slid into the larger brook, making a noise upon the pebbles. The leap and collapse of the run of the water on the stone is a continual miracle there. The change and interchange, the sudden smooth of the glide, cold, brown, glassy, bursting into wrinkles, into bubbles, crinkling into dapples, gold suddenly, instantly blue or brown, a joggle, a plowter, a collapse, always a rush, a hurry, always deliberate, pausing, circling, making up its mind, headlong at last, anon quiet, menacing even, secret.

Just at the meeting of the brooks, the sitting blackbird flew from her nest with a cackle as a man's foot thrust down the plashing of the hedge. It was the morning after the rain, a magical morning. A south-west wind was brushing the sky's face clean. The sky's face was a child's face, laughing through tears. Three or four times the foot beat upon the plashing surging it down at each thrust. The blackbird, glancing back from her cover in a bramble, saw the thorn give. Then a voice spoke, Lionel's voice.

"Can you get over here, Rhoda? It's a bit of a jump."

Rhoda's face peered over the hedge, at the bank on the other side. To step across the hedge to the bank was easy, even to a woman in a skirt, but the bank was four feet above the water, and to jump from that height,

across the brook, on to quaggy landing, would be less easy with a man at hand, less easy, that is, to do decorously. She wanted the day to be perfect. It was her day. All things in the world, within and without, worked together to make it perfect to her. Lionel had just arrived, had been with her twenty minutes. Lunch would not be ready for two and a half hours. The sun shone. Dora had a headache. Dora was stopping indoors. She was with Lionel, walking an April world, in the sun, in the wind, tasting the flame in things.

"It's rather muddy landing, isn't it?" she asked.

Lionel jumped from the hedge, and looked down at the brook's further bank.

"It's the only place to cross the hedge," he said, "without going all that way round to the gate. It's not such bad landing. Come over and see."

He trod down the strong splash with one foot, and helped her across to the bank beside him. The bank was clustered with primrose. In the meadow beyond the daffodils danced, pale and pretty, above stalks which the sun made grey. Her hand was warm in his an instant. She stood beside him, glad of his touch. The wind blew a lock of her hair across her brow. It ruffled there, just above her eye, a pennon to her. They looked together at the prospect. He looked at her.

"You're looking well, Rhoda."

"Isn't it all glorious? I want to dance."

"I'll whistle for you," he answered. Her eyes danced, taking in the leap of a lamb in the field beyond. That was the true dance for April. Lionel spoke again, voicing the time of year. "I like you in a Tam o' Shanter, Rhoda," he said. "And what a pretty tie you're wearing."

"That's the morning. That isn't me. I'm going to be very rash. I'm going to jump from here."

"Let me jump first and give you a hand."

"No. Aha." She bounded outwards, beating her skirts down, clutching them to her. She landed gracefully. There was a squelching noise where her foot plunged into mud. She turned with a little laughing bow, as she withdrew her foot from the quag.

"It's glorious coming through the air," she said. "Come on. See how far you can jump."

"Standing jump?" he asked. "There's no take off for a run."

"Standing jump," she said. "That's where I came to." She pointed to her footprint, already half full of reddish water. She wanted to see the young man's strength. She wanted, also, to give him a chance to exhibit himself.

"Throw me down your cap. I'll hold it for you," she called. "It's sure to blow off." She wanted the picture of his face with the hair ruffled by the wind. He flung down the cap.

"Funk," she cried, swinging the cap to and fro. "Funk." She watched him, delighting in him. He was comely. His charming boy's face was sunny there. His hair ruffled. She noted his grace. She noted the intensity of interest deepening in his eyes when he looked at her. The blood mantled in her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. There was laughter in her hair from the wind. Looking up at him, smiling, she felt the beauty of the young man. She had felt it before, in a vague way. It had been a part of his charm for her. It surged in her now, vaguely, and confusingly, troubling her, making her ashamed, but glowing up, suddenly, with a new significance which was delightful. She saw his slim grace leap with the athlete's beautiful economy of force. "Men are clever with their bodies," she thought. Though that was not her thought, her thought was an emotion of the spring. He landed beside her, with a grace very beautiful to see.

"Who's a funk?" he asked. "I'll trouble you for my cap, please." He took the cap and put it on, still looking at her. "What jolly things women wear," he said, "when they're not on the war-path. Would you like your jacket off, by the way. Aren't you roasting?"

"No. It's light," she said.

"I wish women always wore sensible things," he said. "Human life won't be possible till they do."

"We wear things to please you," she answered. "And you hardly ever notice. And then you grumble."

"You wear things to please yourselves by attracting us," he said. "Women complain that men think too much of a side of life you know nothing about." He checked himself. "I say, Rhoda." He stooped quickly and plucked up a fistful of grass from a tussock. "Put out that foot again. You can't go about like that." He knelt beside her and wiped the shoe with the grass. "You very nearly got a shoeful there," he said.

"Thank you," she said. "Now you've got your hands all muddy. Wash them in the brook." He rinsed them there.

"Now, Rhoda," he said, rising to his feet again. "You're my hostess. Where are you going to take me?"

"I want you to choose," she said. "You choose. You're my guest."

"And if I choose something you don't want?"

"You can't," she answered. "I want it all on a morning like this."

"You won't get tired?"

"No."

"Well. Look here, Rhoda. Is any one coming this afternoon?"

"To see me, do you mean? No." She laughed a

little bright laugh at the knowledge that he wanted her to himself.

"I suppose Dora? . . ." he began. He wasn't quite sincere in his thought for Dora. He was merely asking Rhoda how much he was to be forced to see of her. "Oughtn't we to stay in to amuse Dora?"

"If Dora's well enough, she's got to go out this afternoon, to call on the Fusters."

"Will you be going with her?"

"I could." She made a little *moue*.

"You won't?" She looked at him with hauteur.

"Will you be able to stay tea?" she asked, scrupulously polite.

"Yes. If you will let me."

"I can't call on the Fusters if you stay."

"Then I'll stay," he said firmly.

"There's a good train at 7.1," she said, smiling.

"Then we've got the day together?" She gravely nodded. Her eyes danced.

"Well, then," he said, eyeing her face with grave approval. "We mustn't do too much this morning. Take me where you like. But I vote we don't go far, if you don't mind. Where will you take me?"

"First of all," she said. "I'll take you up the slope here. There's a jolly place just on this side of the copse. It looks as though it had once been a quarry. I call it the Place of Blossom. I'll pick you some white violets for your button-hole." She spread her arms to the sun. "I want to run," she cried. "I want to sing. I want to dance." She flitted lightly up the slope into the hollow of the quarry. The flow of the neat short skirt gave grace to her running. He followed. He found her on her knees near the thorn, smelling some white violets. "Smell," she cried, holding them out to him. "Aren't they heavenly?" He took the violets. As he took them he touched the frank, firm, graceful fingers. He

realised from the touch not so much the sanctity of maidenhood as its genuineness, its courage, and freshness. He had not realised the girl before.

"What fine things girls are," he said. She nodded at him quizzically.

"We are," she said. "Only—" she paused a minute, looking hard at him, for an instant, then dropping her eyes. "We aren't fine in the porcelain flower way. I wish men would see that we don't live on chocolates and roses, any more than we live on brandy. We live on meat and air, just like you. The only difference is in the things that we're afraid of. We're afraid of all sorts of things which you don't mind. And you'd be afraid of all sorts of things we're proud of. Isn't this place heavenly? I found it by accident."

"It's heavenly. But ought you to be kneeling?" His hand thrust about the grass, testing its dryness.

"I'm all right. I don't take cold easily."

"Sure?"

"Sure. Besides it's quite dry. Isn't the sun wonderful?"

"Yes. Rhoda! Let's have tea here. We'll bring out rugs and mackers and have tea here."

"Yes. Let's."

"And now let's go into the woods. Shall we? Or shall we go bird's nesting?"

"Into the woods."

"Enter these enchanted woods ye who dare. Do you dare?"

"Yes, I dare," she said. She looked up at the many branches. She was taking in delight from every sense. The beauty of the day seemed to add to her beauty at each instant. "I know how Diana felt," she added. "The spring makes me long to be hunting something. To be going barefooted. Running down a deer, along that grass. To feel one's feet alive. Wouldn't it be glorious?"

"Glorious."

"Shall we have a race?" She was on her feet, looking at him with mischievous eyes of invitation.

"No," he said. "Spendthrift. We've got the day for a race. Let me pick you a buttonhole." He picked a couple of dozen white violets. Their warm sweet scent came upon them, now and then, on waves of the air, like the touch of a presence. He added three blue violets as accents. "Will you wear these?" he asked, holding them out to her.

"Thank you," she said, lazily. She pressed them against her lips under pretence of smelling them. "How sweet they are," she said. "Oh the flowers and the grass and the spring. How I love them." She stood up, slipped off her jacket, and tucked the violets into her belt. She looked at him for his look of approval of her. He liked her in that girlish short skirt, white flannel blouse and tie.

"Let me carry your coat," he said. "And now for the woods."

"The woods," she said.

"The woods," he repeated. "Those excitable wildernesses where Diana swings her bow."

They paused at the gate of the woods. They looked up the ride which stretched in front of them into the wood's heart. The shatterings of sunlight fell across the ride in a trembling criss-cross of flots. The shadows of the twigs trembled on the gold of the flots. The catkins quivered on the hazels. The wood-anemones bowed before the wind, giving that old impression, renewed every spring, that they were a host at charge, bowing white helmets, hurrying. A gust came out of the air. It swept into the wood, touching the cheeks of the pair with the same caress. It brushed up a few dead leaves with a rustle. Then it bowed down all the army of anemones. Leaf and stalk and flower they bowed,

as though they were putting down their heads, and charging, charging, up the wood to the battle. Their leaves fluttered like wagging skirts. Here and there a crest tossed, out of the plane of the bowed heads. The little noise of their fluttering was like something spoken by the wood.

The gust died out, leaving a stillness. The sun beat warm on the cheeks turned to each other. Far away up the ride a rabbit loitered, sampling the grass. On the trunk of an oak near the gate was a notice:—

“TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.”

“Do you dare?” said Lionel.

“Yes,” she said. “I dare. We’ll go right up to my Sacred Grove. There’s a great cup cut in the earth at the top of the hill. It’s all grown over with trees. And I pretend it’s a Sacred Grove. We’ll go there.”

“And worship?”

“Or dance.”

“The gate’s padlocked.” He swung himself over with a power of muscle which pleased and surprised her.

“Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride,” she said. “I’ve got to climb a step at a time.” She laid her jacket on the top bar and began the ascent. He tucked the jacket under his arm. It was fragrant with that smell of violets which always hung about her clothes. Holding out a hand he took the frank virginal hand outstretched to him. Rhoda paused with a little nervous laugh on the passage to the top bar from the bar below it.

“Would you like both hands?” he asked.

“No, thanks,” she answered, jumping. She landed beside him, breathing rather hard.

“Will you have your coat in the wood?”

“No, thanks.”

"What shall we talk about? We ought not to talk. We ought to sing."

"Save your breath for the climb," she said. "It's a steep pull up. But there'll be a view at the top."

"That's what you always get for dilating the heart," he said. "A complete sense of the beauty you've abandoned."

"That's a most cynical thing to say. The view's very fine."

"Well. Show me England," he said. "England. A lot of England. All a valley, with cities, and smoke, and the fields like counties in a map. Rhoda. I'll race you to that big elm for a box of chocolates."

"De Bry's?"

"Glutton. No. Ordinaries."

"Give me to those primroses?"

"Yes."

"Not croquettes? Creams?"

"Blue creams."

"You'll have to start."

"All right."

They started.

High up in the elm tree a blue jay flashed away screaming. A blackbird, startled from her nest by the scream, chattered down the wood, filling all feathered things with fright. Far off the racers heard a rabbit beat his warning on the earth, to tell his fellows of some one crazy coming to spoil the April for them.

CHAPTER XI

THE cottage shared by Rhoda and Dora stood well away from the road. It was an old, half-timbered house, thatched with reeds from the lake. A little flower garden stood between it and the lane. The small scarlet tulips made the garden bright. Two rows of them flowered on each side of the bricked walk from the gate to the door. Elsewhere in the garden were double daffodils, a few hyacinths (for the scent) and some wallflowers. The door and windows stood open, letting in the southerly sun. In the glow of light, one could see within, to the cool and pretty room, feminine to the last touch, which the two women used as a sitting-room.

The room ran the whole length of the cottage. The wooden staircase which led to the upper floor stood at one end, the staircase was steep and simple. It had a white manrope instead of rail or bannister. The manrope gave it yet another likeness to the hatchway of a ship. At the back of the room, at the east end, was a door. It led to a smaller room, the dining-room, which communicated with the kitchen.

The sitting-room pleased one continually with unexpected little finenesses of taste. It was a spotless room. The wall-paper was white, the carpet was a matting of fine white straw. The sofa was covered with a white chintz, faintly crossed with lines of green. The same chintz covered the cushions on the wide-armed antique kitchen chairs. Cream-coloured Wedgwood bowls, full of flowers, stood upon the tables. There was a small French mirror over the mantel.

On the mantel were some tiny Worcester ivy-leaf dishes, and a collection of little old silver toys. The toys were of several kinds. There were tiny chairs, tiny tables, a little nef on wheels, a delicate silver cow, a mannikin with a wide umbrella. Time had given them a tarnish. They pleased by their form. In the end, things do. Their grace made a dainty dish for the trivial in those who looked at them. The grey of their tarnish took a value from the withered blue of the china. At each end of the mantel, was a tall, severe, eighteenth-century silver candlestick. These stood sentinel in front of the old French mirror. To the thinking visitor, the rest of the room gave evidence that man had not progressed in the precise ways of disciplined thought, since that silver was reduced to law. There was a good bookcase full of books: Anatole France, George Sand, some Balzacs, Pierre Loti, De Maupassant. The English books were mostly novels. Dora's tastes were shown by a book on mountaineering, a couple of Yellow Books, half a dozen Baedekers, the same number of monographs on famous etchers, and five huge blue folios of evidence before the Commission to enquire into the Living-in System in its Relation to Female Shop Assistants. Dora had once collected evidence for that Commission. The knowledge that she had once helped the King's "right trusty and well-beloved" sustained her in her present idleness. She felt that she had earned the right to "go on to something else," to develop other sides of her. On one of the little dainty tables were a few paper-bound novels beneath a silver box containing cigarettes. Two little French escritaires stood in opposite corners of the room. Their pigeon-holes were stuffed with letters and papers. Women's desks accumulate material. They are like women's minds. Men have the habit of clearing out "rubbish," *i.e.*, the merely old, from time to time, without reference to sentiment. Letters which

were once a joy or an agony have few sentimental claims upon a man, after the emotion has lost its first poignancy. A man always has the present, with its appetites for work and pleasure, to keep his thoughts external, and in front of him. Rhoda's desk was decorated with a Wedgwood bowl full of primroses and moss. On her blotting-pad was a ball of blue silk. Beside it her knitting needles stuck out brightly, at angles, from a half-finished tie which she was knitting. Dora's blotting-pad bore a little flat silver dish containing blue sealing-wax, a seal and a cigarette-holder.

There were few pictures on the walls. Flanking the fireplace, one on each side, were charcoal drawings done (evidently in the eighteenth century) by a Mr. Jonas Heywood of the Rissen. One of them represented an eighteenth century gentleman engaged in partridge shooting full face, the other the same man out partridge-shooting profile. The small size of the drawings brought the coveys very close to the guns. It was even left doubtful in one case whether it were the gun or the partridge which exploded. Antiquarian sportsmen looking at these sketches noted with regret the length of the stubble of those days, when the harvest was hand-reaped, and birds lay close.

The other pictures in the room were mostly photographs. There was a signed photograph of Maunsel, standing in mufti on a terrace. There was a photograph of Dora's brother, taken shortly before he was killed. A handsome youth. Dora with a moustache. Dora made man. His sudden death partly explained Dora's recklessness. She had been much devoted to her brother. The sudden cutting off of the beloved brings a horror which daunts the soul. Often (perhaps more in women than among men) one may sense under an outward gay defiance, a mind daunted and cowed, unable to go on. Dora saw her brother killed. It was

at a Hunt steeple-chase. The horse fell at a fence, breaking the rider's neck. She was watching through her race glasses. She waited for him to rise, just as the wife of a boxer may watch her man, sent down and out, trying to fumble up before the gong goes. She waited and waited. The horse scrambled up. The horse got up and went on, as a horse will, for joy of the race. He took the fences with the field. His stirrup-irons flashed aloft at each stride with a rattle and yank. He finished in front, crazy with the pride of it. But down at the fence there was a heap. It looked like a crumpled carpet. She could see a streak of white, and a rag of scarlet. Then a little crowd formed. A little crowd excited in the middle. A boy running up, peered between men's legs, turned, and beckoned excitedly to his fellow, yelling something. Then a man thrusting out of the crowd held up his arms over the fence to stop the last of the racers. She saw the horse baulk and toss. She saw the man get down, and run round, with that funny straddle of the legs. She got down and ran, then, though a man, running to meet her, tried to stop her. Everybody seemed to be running with her, even "Your old friend Balmy Bill," the bookie. Ah, that memory, that memory.

Lying on the sofa, in pain, shivering and white, glad of the fire, even on that warm day, Dora went over her memory with the knowledge that in four days' time it would be just two years ago. Men do not realise the poignancy of a woman's memories. They have not woman's power of living over again what has entered in to hurt. They cannot draw fresh agony from the agony of the past as women can and do. What a woman loves, and what has hurt her, she consecrates. Even the innocent trespasser may not tread on the ground so consecrated. And the myth plays itself over daily in the heart. It is a sin, hard to pardon, when one

not initiated utters, even innocently, a text from the ritual.

Lying on the sofa with the *Mannequin d'Osier* on the table beside her, she went again through all that misery of memory. Balmy Bill's offer of brandy for the lydy, a smear of clay on Hugh's face as they lifted him, the sudden knowledge that Hugh, the heart of her life, had stopped. One instant rising to the leap with Fireball, a youth with the blood singing in him. The next a heap on the grass, unable forever to feel the nubble of the broken bone, unable . . . Couldn't do it.

The latch of the garden-gate clicked. There was a noise of steps on the bricks of the walk. Rhoda and Lionel were loitering up to the house to lunch, pausing to admire the flowers. Dora smiled wearily. A sudden spasm of pain brought the tears to her eyes, but she fought down both tears and pain. She wearily brought herself to a sitting posture. She faced the couple with the old heroism of woman. Woman holds the tradition of behaviour before friends. That is often a sharper test of courage than that behaviour before the enemy to which men are prompted by flutes and soft recorders, their natural valour and the boots of their sergeants. She forced a smile on to her face. They entered, Rhoda with the feeling that she had been "rather a beast," in leaving her friend to face her wretchedness alone, Lionel a little weary from his walk, a little excited from his morning. He looked at Dora with his clinical eye.

"Aren't you people sick of being out of doors?" Dora asked. "There's always something so revolting to me about people who are always out of doors. We've got beyond being out of doors. We're made for something sensible. Much better sit over the fire and look at my John drawing. You look so disgustingly healthy if you stay out all day. And then you make pigs of

yourself at lunch. Show Mr. Heseltine the way to the bathroom. He'll want to wash his hands."

In the bathroom Lionel felt inclined to strip and bathe. He had come down that morning from his chambers in the Temple. He had come to this miracle of cleanness and brightness, this white, pretty home, so dainty, so spotless. A sense of personal filth came over him as he looked at each new cleanness. The enamel of the bath, the brass of the taps, the windows, the towels. All were spotless. The air and the sun came purely through the window. There were no smuts scurrying on the bare, well-holystoned boards of the floor. His sense of cleanliness, sharpened by many months of hospital work, told him that he was the only unclean thing there. He felt that the filth of London was thick upon him, grimed in to him, the stench of London in his clothes, the grime in his hair. Oh, to cast off all those clothes, plunge in water in the spotless enamel, ply soap and scrubber and strigil, get into the pores the clean smell of Pinol, then rise after a rinse, to dress in white towels, in a big enveloping white towel, at once warm and light and clean; and so to lunch purified. Purified. "Would to God," he thought, "that my filthy countrymen could come to care for purity." He turned up his shirt sleeves to the shoulder, took off his collar (with a rueful look at the place where some London air had been crushed against it), and washed with the wallowing joy of a sailor after rain. As he dried his mop of hair, peering at himself, between rubs, in the mirror, he felt to the full the loveliness of a woman's delight in cleanliness, the fineness of that standard of life, the want of that standard in Mrs. Holder. "Men live like pigs," he thought. He meant that Rhoda, standing in her simple white flannel blouse, in the sun flots of a ride in April, was most unlike a man. He preened himself before the glass. A hair-brush had

been left for him. He saw that it was a woman's brush. "Thoughtful of them," he thought, wondering, an instant later, if the thoughtfulness had been implanted in them by brothers or lovers. He would not use the brush. He would as soon have used another person's tooth-brush. He preened with a pocket-comb.

At lunch he held forth on the beauty of Feasts of Purification. How sensible it would be to give Feasts of Purification instead of dinners. Everybody in London, thanks to the idiotic Poor Law and indiscriminate charity, can be sure of a dinner of some sort, if not of several dinners. But nobody can be sure of being even tolerably clean. Why does not some cleanly person who has achieved the impossible by keeping clean in London, bid his friends to some sacrament of the wash, to a feast of many courses, hot, tepid, and cold, "ten feet deep and as clear as gin," with spotless bath-ropes for each guest? Some white music or other might play to them. Or no, not music, the run and glitter of dripping fountains. And the floor and walls would be of white enamel. And the perfumes would be good, cleanly hydrochloric and carbolic.

After lunch, Rhoda made coffee for them, while Dora relapsed to her place on the sofa. Rhoda was attentive to Dora, smoothed her cushions for her, tended her gently, prepared hot milk for her. Lionel had the tact to walk into the garden.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" Dora asked. "I mean, where will you go?"

"I hadn't made any plans, dear. I hoped so that you'd be well enough to come with us. You won't go to the Fusters?"

"I don't know. I suppose I ought. It's not far."

"Dear. You oughtn't to go. You ought to go to bed." She very gently took her friend's head in her cool hands. "Dear, your head's dreadful hot and

bangish. Won't you let me put you to bed? I could come up and read to you."

"What about him?" Dora indicated the garden with a glance of the eye. "No. I am a pig, but I'm not going to be a swine." She caught Rhoda's hand, and fondled it with the weary tenderness of the sick. She got up from the sofa and peered at her face in the mirror, patting her hair. "I suppose I look a wreck," she said. "I wish you'd get some rouge, Rhoda. What's the time, now? A quarter to three. I'll go up and get tidy. I'll go to the Fusters. It'll do me good." She paused, primming her lips at her image, and then continued, "All the same, I'm glad I'm not a man." She looked shrewdly at Rhoda's vivid face, to see if Rhoda were finding it blessed to be a woman. Rhoda hung her head. Her face had a deep gentleness upon it.

"Yes," said Rhoda. "Men haven't got it all."

Dora smiled a pained smile. It flickered off her lips with a wryness which told of an inner pang. She drew closer to her friend, looking at her. With two fingers she brushed an imaginary speck from Rhoda's tie. It was done caressingly. Rhoda's head drooped lower to hide the mantling colour. She caught the hand swiftly to her cheek.

"It must be rather wonderful," said Dora, kissing her, and moving away. She was afraid of emotion now; very much afraid of the affections. Love filled life and then tore it in two. She was going to be very careful to keep out love. She was going to be defiant, treat the world as a tavern. She would have companions, perhaps, whose roads would turn off when the time came, or fellow soldiers who would fall out of the ranks unwept; but never more than that, never any one nearer, never love again. She would do mad things. She had been convinced that the way to happiness was not to

care too much. To treat life as a game, enjoy the game, and take no heed of the players, that was the true wisdom. The defiance which she used now as a shield made her turn near the stairs, with her gesture of cynicism.

"I've ordered supper at six-thirty," she said. "Don't wait for me. Sir Borman's going to show me his daffodils." She smiled with shut eyes.

"Dora."

Dora mimicked the manner of Sir Borman:

"Have you seen my Trumpet-Majors this year, Miss Plunket? It's a variety I've been trying to get here. It's a larger flower than the Darling. It's rather more like the Phoebus Apollo. Except that the trumpet is more sharply dentated." She had her hand upon the manrope. She was only doing one of the countless self-sacrifices which make up a woman's life.

"Dora dear."

"Yes."

"Dear Dora."

"Oh, rubbish. I wonder if you'd be a saint, and sing out to Jane to bring me my grey dress. It's in the press in the passage."

"I'll get it."

"I'll get it myself." Dora turned back into the room, humming in broken scraps, her favourite ditty of "Oben, wo die Sterne glühen." "Now, Rhoda," she said. "Run away and give him a cigarette." Rhoda took her friend by the shoulders and kissed her on both cheeks, much moved. Her eyes had tears in them. Dora looked at her friend inscrutably.

"You poor old thing," she said. "Well. I must dress. You run away, now. Jane'll hook me. I'll just tell her. You're rather a dear." She leaned over languidly and kissed Rhoda's burning cheek. Hurrying out into the passage, she made rather a lot of noise

pulling her dress from the press. After a peep to see if the man were still out of the room, she made a dash with her spoil for the hatchway. She sang in pants as she climbed. Rhoda, looking at herself in the glass of her own room, before running down to join Lionel, heard that song of resurrection coming from a mouth full of hairpins, a word at the exodus of each pin.

CHAPTER XII

NEAR the top of Ponton Hill, the wood ends. Between the wood and the summit there is a bald patch, covered with coarse grass. The bald patch is some thirty yards across. It is like a ring of paleness shutting in the summit. In the summer, that grass is the haunt of blindworms, not usually common elsewhere. At the very top of the hill, sprouted with a clump of trees, there is an ancient earthwork. A trench twelve feet deep surrounds a mound twenty-five feet high. The interior of the mound is hollowed out into a basin, about fifteen yards across. The earthwork is so small that antiquarians are much puzzled by it. What was its use? Why did men, who had no iron, go to the trouble of making this trenched mound? Much care went to its making. The outer trench is symmetrical, a perfect circle. The mound is symmetrical. Rabbits have made some of it fall. The red clay lies in a heap in one place, torn out by the roots of a fallen tree. Otherwise the place is not much changed (but for the trees and the weeds) since the unknown delvers left it. It stands very high. It commands a wide prospect. "A very good look-out place," some people say. "Men stationed there could watch the ford of the Drowse," the gleam of which flashes out about a mile and a half to the south-east. How the ford was watched at night is not explained. "Probably by some system of swift runners. These ancient Britons were probably very swift runners." Others, still prone to thoughts of war, think that the mound was a "signal station." "The ancient Britons must have had some system of signalling." Macaulay's ballad about the Armada is quoted.

"Twelve fair counties saw the gleam from Malvern's lonely height." "Depend upon it," these say, "this place was a place where they lit beacon fires. At the time of the Jubilee when they lit a fire here, they could see it in Drowcester, which must be twelve miles as the crow flies. That just shows you," they exclaim. Others say that it wasn't made by the ancient Britons at all. "It is an artificial rabbit-warren, made in Elizabethan times by some man fond of rabbiting. It's the very place for a rabbit-warren. Look how the rabbits have burrowed in the sides there." Some think that the place was a religious place, "an high place," (quoting Numbers xxiii.). This opinion is confirmed in them by the trees. "It's a grove of trees. Of course the trees are young, but they're the descendants of the old trees. I daresay, if you were to dig, you'd come across the altar in the middle." Some say that the place was a fold or pen in which primitive man saved his cattle from the wolves. Some, in spite of the small size of the enclosure, think that it was the home of a chief. They believe that the cup-like hollow of the mound was once roofed in, with skins stretched upon wattles. They think that the chief held court there, ruling his clan, dating his proclamations from it, "at our mound in Ponton." Some, who have not considered the matter much (the makers of the cycling maps are among these), describe the place vaguely as "a camp." Who shall say who is "right"? Nobody knows. Nobody ever will know. It is best that we should make up our minds at once as to its value in human interest here and now, its power to add power to the brain, by brightening a facet the more. It belongs to the past. It belongs to a past so dead that its true significance has gone from the world. Better leave it in the past. Better accept it thankfully as a place where pure wind blows, a place with a view of

England, much England. Standing there one sees the many coloured fields, a gleam of river, city spires flaming out of smoke, hills hiding the sea, all the theatre of the play of life. One can boil a kettle with the twigs which have fallen into the trench, and make tea there peacefully, and drink it, and give God thanks. Afterwards, in the quiet there, one can try to get at deeper truths than the truth which the savage sought. The savage dug with a flint, shovelling the earth. We dig with something sharp in the brain. We dig in Paradise and in the stars.

Rhoda led Lionel out of Ponton Wood to the space of grass. "There," she said, "there's my Sacred Grove. Isn't it just like a sacred grove?" She paused a moment, and then asked, "Why are groves so sacred, Lionel?"

"Oh, many reasons," he said, wondering how much of the truth she would like to hear, "but generally there's some rather subtle, strange, religious belief at the back of them. A grove at the top of a hill, in 'an high place,' is difficult to get at. That gives it a kind of sacredness. Then it's aloof from the ordinary mortal. From the daily life of the tribe, that is. But perhaps that's the same thing. Then it's secret. A priest can put away a heretic without much trouble in a grove of trees at the top of a hill. And in the same way, he can, if he likes, arrange all sorts of Mumbo Jumbo to impress the people. The great dodge is to make an idol whistle. You make an ordinary whistle, and stick it in the idol's mouth. You blow it by squeezing a hidden bladder into it. You arrange things so that you can sit well away from the idol when you work the oracle. The congregation get far too big a jump to want to suspect you."

"What a lot of things you know, Lionel. Have you actually seen that done?"

"I've known of it being done. And I've seen the bladder thing and the whistle in the idol. But I've generally kept clear of medicine men. There's no need to waste your strength in fighting little business rivals. I don't know that we're so much better." By this time they had arrived at the grove. Lionel looked at it curiously.

"So it gives you a religious sense?" he asked. "What sort of a religious sense? Established Church?" She smiled, and blushed a little.

"Something with a little more head on it?" he suggested. "Tell me, Rhoda. Does it make you want to dance?"

"Yes," she said. "It gives me a longing to be free."

"How curious," he said. "I wonder if everybody feels that, or whether you and I are rather sensitive to the same things."

"Do you feel that, too?"

"Yes. There's something in being on a hill-top which makes my heart beat. It might be merely the pure air giving a fillip." He stopped, to give his ruthless mind a chance to clear itself of possible sentiment. "No," he went on. "It's the hill-top. It's a jumping off place for the spirit."

"Don't you think the view?" said Rhoda, shading her eyes, as she faced to the south-west. "Mightn't that have something to do with it?"

"I want to get beyond that," he said, musing. "It goes deeper than that. The short-sighted get it." They stared together at the view. They saw it as the rooks saw it, from the heights, with nothing above them but clouds bowling on the blue. Bowling aloft there, so near, so very near, they were strangely like the bows of ships. Ships making a bubble, nosing deep into it, white to the rail. The softness of the white was another

tenderness to the minds of the watchers. And beyond that softness was the blue, infinitely bright and gentle, an intense, glad flame of blue. The wind made a noise in the grove. The trees bowed a little, giving to the blast, with a shivering of touching branches. The branches were not in leaf. There was a dustiness of buds upon them. They were at that moment when the beauty of the branch against the sky has that other beauty of the beginning leaf upon it. Far down below in the valley, England was at peace. The fields were like the lands in a map. Smoke marked the villages. A spire stood out. Drowcester Cathedral tower glowed out white like a lighthouse. Cows in a meadow called. Their moving was like the ploughed field speaking. The air was an intoxication with the laughter of the blackbirds. Up there on the hill, the sense of possession filled the heart. The landscape was a heritage displayed. One owns only what the imagination grasps. Here for a moment the imagination glowed with the vision of immense possession. And with this came an exultation of being thrust far up, by the power of the earth, into the cup of the sky, into a life new and strange, fiery, and of a new glory. Long ago in the past men of strong passions felt the same there. They hallowed the hill-top in intense moments till it had the life they gave it. Perhaps some aura, or influence, of that old hallowing, lingered. Places where the mood of man has been intense are haunted, according to the depth of the mood. Wherever love, or hate, or joy has been, the spirit of the earth is coloured. We walk in a subtle air which takes colour from our intensity. Those who follow in our paths sense suddenly the rosiness or blackness of the places where we have felt. Our lives are creating spirits which will haunt the ways we have trodden. We talk of our moods as though they were our own. What can say that they are ours? We walk

the air which has received the spirits of all the dead and the longings of all the living. For the rest, we are mainly water, and water is useful for making mud-pies, and for reflecting the sun.

Lionel looked at Rhoda with the feeling that that young English girl was worth all the views in the world. Once, long before, he had looked down on India from above the snow-line. He thought of that now. There were pinnacles splintering on the sky, a film of cataract drowsing down a crag in rainbows, mist in eddies, peaks stainless in the glare. Beneath was the gloom of pine-forests, making the earth-beasts' shoulders shaggy. It was cold there. He had cooked and eaten and gone on, he and his chief, old Sir Patrick. He had looked on Asia, and talked of the cold. And now this English earth was stirring up religion in him.

"How do you feel, Rhoda?" he asked. He could not help it; but his voice shook a little. She looked at him quickly, looked quickly down, then turned as quickly to him.

"I'm very well," she said, smiling.

"You look well." He came a step nearer. Something in her face made him look again at the view with a quickening of joy in it. "Life is kind sometimes," he said, gazing. "Tell me, Rhoda. What have been the good days in your life?"

"The good days?" she said. "I don't know. So many of the days have been good. A woman doesn't count the good days. She remembers the bad days, and counts the surpassing days."

"And what were your surpassing days, Rhoda?"

"Oh," she answered, staring away into a distant century. "Let me think what was a surpassing day. The day I left school was a surpassing day. I had a five pound note to spend as I pleased, and afterwards I went to see *Twelfth Night*."

"What did you buy?" he asked. She turned the gold bangle on her wrist.

"Might I touch?" he said.

"What do you want to do that for?"

"It would give me a share in your surpassing day."

"No," she said. "I was very missish when I bought this."

"I want to know about that."

"Oh, you know what girls are. Tremendous sentiment about every tremendous humbug. I'm not going to tell you about that. I don't want you to share in a me who is dead."

"Will you let me share in another surpassing day?"

"Some day, perhaps."

"What was the last surpassing day?"

"I'm not quite sure that there has been another. One only leaves school once in one's life."

"One leaves school every day of one's life. Every instant. Every cell of body, and every tick of time's a school. It gives us a new sensation and teaches us a new thing."

"To-day's a holiday. Women only learn in holidays."

"When the brothers are at home."

"Don't be horrid." She smiled, as she turned towards the grove. They paused at the brink of the ditch.

"We haven't learned about this sacred grove yet, Rhoda. Is there a path, or do you just go down the ditch?"

"You just go down the ditch. What do you think this place was made for?"

"A special time in life," he said. "That's what the world is made for. And the works of man. And woman, too." He went scrambling down into the ditch, balancing himself. Turning at the bottom, he held out a hand to her.

"Yes. But what time?" she asked, coming gingerly down, putting out a shy hand to him.

"This place? Or the world? Or the woman?"

"Well. All three. This is school. For what time was this place made?"

"For Spring-time."

"And the world?"

"For now."

"And the last? What about the last? You're not going to say that we are made for any special time?" She paused, with one foot upon the spring of the mound. She looked at him with wide, grey, virginal eyes, frank with a girl's courage.

"You're made for the moment, just as I am," he said.

"This moment?"

"For the moment." A sense that this was not the moment made him plod up the mound. Catching a tree trunk with one hand he leaned down, caught her hand, and drew her up beside him.

"How strong you are," she said.

"I know how to use what strength I have. I'm not strong," he explained. They scrambled up to the top in a race. Rhoda won. She watched his last scrambling steps from a post above him. She laughed. "Well, Come on," she said. "Come and look at the view from the tipty-top." She led the way round the rim of the cup. She stopped at the eastern point. Standing close together, they peered through the trees at the distant river.

"It's not a good place for a dance," he said.

"No, not to dance," she answered, "but to be free. The heart dances inside."

"Your heart?"

"Yes. Do you think they danced up here, the ancient Britons?"

"Yes. A kind of dance." She sensed some reservation in his mind.

"A horrid kind?"

"A thanksgiving for the bounty of the earth." She wrinkled her pretty nose disdainfully.

"I don't think I like this place," she said. "It's got too thin lips. I think it drank blood."

"Heart's blood."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's the only coin which can set free. Yet who knows? I think this cup is the symbol of the cauldron. It may be nothing of the kind. It may be a desirable residence, where a patriarch lived surrounded by his cattle."

They went loitering across the grass towards the wood.

"How is your work going?" she asked.

"I'm trying to begin to do it," he said. She felt that he didn't want to talk of it.

"You'd rather not talk of it. A woman so seldom hears about a man's work."

"They're spared a good deal," he said, brightening. "The only necessary work is getting food to grow and getting food to market. And we've invented all this fever. And life lasts for, say, twenty potent years. And one never knows if there'll be any thereafter. It may end altogether."

"I don't think it can," said Rhoda.

"Well, it changes altogether," he said. "And that's as hard to bear."

"What's the time, now?" she asked. "If we've time, I'll take you back by the brook. Don't you love to be by running water?"

"Yes," he answered. "I like running water. It's the only thing which is quite as senseless as life. It makes me see what man could do with life if he would treat it as the chattering wasteful force it is. Dam it up, and stank it up. Lead it into needed channels, and turn a few mills with it."

"What mills?"

"The Mills of the Gods, Rhoda."

"What mills are they?"

"That is what we're here to find out. God has a purpose in the world. Life has a purpose, or it couldn't be. Man will learn what that purpose is some day. Then there'll be a world, Rhoda."

"What sort of world?"

"A dainty dish to set before Rhoda."

"The world's a dainty dish on a day like this," she said. "It's this way to the brook. Is it four yet?"

"Just upon."

"Then we've time before tea." She slipped nimbly through a swing-gate with a lightness which made him marvel at her grace. She paused to watch him swing through after her. "What wonderful things you tell me," she said. "How wonderful life must be to you, believing that."

"It isn't," he said.

"Ah, do you say that, Lionel?" she asked. "Isn't it an atonement to have the ideas? What's the good of ideas, if they don't make life more glorious?"

"Yes," he said. "What is the good of them, if one can't apply them to life?"

"But you will, Lionel. That's what you're doing," she cried. "That's where you're so wonderful. You're going to do wonderful things. And then, when you've done them, I shall say, 'Yes. I know him. He's a friend of mine.'"

They were stopped by a hedge. Lionel stamped it down for her. The brook lay beyond them. A note of its voice came to them. It was a plaintive note, like the note of a bird, repeated over and over, as an ever-changing ripple slipped from a stone.

"Listen to that," said Rhoda. "It was making just that noise when the ancient Britons were being

beasts. Isn't it like a voice trying to catch a tune. A little gentle voice?"

"It comes in a Chopin thing," he answered. "What is the thing?" He hummed it. The gentle intricate notes were like the gurgle of swift water slipping. "Do you know that?" he asked. "The man's mind became a brook to do that. He gives you the point of view of the stone, too. Art is worth doing, when you can do it with that intensity." They walked to the brook. They dropped dry leaves together, into the wrinkling eddies, to see them sucked down under the stone which made the gurgle. They sailed sticks down a reach. Rhoda maintained that she was Oxford. The sticks made a good race down a rapid, then loitered among brambles, turning end for end. Lastly they reached an elbow of the brook, where water turned lazily in a circle. The sticks paused outside the eddy, hesitating. They twitched together, and slipped inside, as though they had made up their minds. Their backers flung clods at them to drive them out. The clods made the sticks bob, but failed to clear them. They continued to jog together, round the circle, feeling the stream at each curve, but never quite making up their minds to set out again.

"That's what happens to things," said Lionel. "They get jolly comfortable in a backwash, and forget that they aren't in the stream."

He broke off suddenly to look at something in the water.

"What's that?" said Rhoda. Something was scurrying up-stream along the mud at the bottom. A settling trail of mud drifted away from its swiftness. "Is it a water-rat?"

"No. It can't be a trout?"

"No. An otter. An otter. I've always longed to see an otter." The scurrying creature gleamed.

"No. It's not an otter," said Lionel. "I know what it is. It's a water-ousel. They can go like that, under water, like a fish. And when they wish, they catch hold of a weed and keep themselves under water, like Ibsen's Wild Duck. Doesn't that make your spirit sing?"

"You mean the power of living in another element? He has to let go in the end."

"Yes," he answered, sighing. "So have we, in the end. And about all we achieve is to stir up the mud a little."

They loitered along the brook. No one can walk fast by running water. The beauty of the babbling changed to a beauty of rippling, and that to a depth and coolness, clear, though with motes in suspension, sandy below, shot across with the dance of light. Near the little plank bridge they found a bottle. It had once carried milk for a picnic party. Lionel glanced along the bank for a supply of stones. Not far away there was a place where the cows of many generations had trodden down the bank. They had gone to water there, day after day. They had stamped themselves a road there. The floods of many Marches had widened the track into a bay. Eddies had left sand there, little beds of pebbles, water-logged thorns, leaves with lime crust on them. Lionel hurried there, to gather stones.

"We can't go from here till we have had cock-shies at this bottle," he explained. "That would be scorning the gift of the Gods,"

"Bring the stones, then," said Rhoda. He brought them. He set the bottle moving drunkenly down the current. The pair leaned on the hand-rail, with pebbles ranged in a row in front of them. They opened fire as the bottle bobbed within range. The bottle bobbed strangely as bottles in a seaway will. It had a kind of drunken roll, which hove it clear of many a good

pebble. The water splashed all round the gyrating neck. The glass ducked and curtsied to the volleying. Lionel's shot hit the water sharply. He was irritated.

"I can't hit it," said Rhoda. She laughed. Lionel snatched a loose brick from the supports of the bridge, hove it down fiercely, vertically, as the bottle nodded into the current under the plank. There was a great splash.

"Missed it," cried Rhoda.

"I'll get it as it comes out on the other side," he said. He turned, fitting a "smooth stone out of the brook" into his curved forefinger.

"No," said Rhoda. "It ought to be allowed to go free, now. Let it go, Lionel."

"Sentiment," he said. The bottle glided out into the open. It had an air of unconcern. It seemed like a thought, precise, and self-complete, going untroubled through all the vagueness of folly. "Let it go," said Rhoda. "I'd like you to let it go."

"What's your idea?" he asked.

"I'd like you to let it go."

"Even to the half of my kingdom," he answered. He held out the pebble to her. She put out her hand to take it. He pressed the pebble into her palm, and held her hand for just that very little longer. She whitened. Her head drooped. Her mouth moved. She trembled. It was more a trembling than a movement which tried to release her hand. He hung his head. He would not look at her distress. He gently pressed her hand and released it. Turning from her, he looked over the handrail into the water. She stood staring, with unseeing eyes, at a bunch of rushes. Frost, or the hoof of a beast, had made a fall of the bank a little way down stream. An erect red clod stood up in the stream like a little island, two feet from the bank. It bore a bunch of rushes, like erect, spiny hair. She

stared at the rushes; but her mind took in no picture of them. Her mouth trembled. She was trying to bite her lip. Her hands tried aimlessly to impress a pebble upon each other. Incredible thoughts went across her brain in fire.

"Rhoda," he said, turning to her. His voice was husky. His throat was so dry that the words stuck in it like chips. "Rhoda." She tried to look at and to answer him. She put out a hand to the rail. She was aware of him standing there. She was dimly aware of a noise of water. The sky, which had been so blue in that long-ago century two minutes before, was a clanging glare of flame. He touched her hand very very gently, covering it, almost without contact, with his.

"We must go," he said.

"Yes," she said, vaguely. She let him lead her off the bridge. He did not speak to her for some minutes. He walked half a pace ahead of her. She walked as though she were his dog "come to heel." He walked fast. Presently he stopped. They were near a second little plank bridge. On the other side of the brook, on the gentle lower slope of Ponton, was the grey of the quarry face of the place of Blossom. The tassels of the catkins were trembling there. During the day, a wild cherry had broken into blossom just above it.

"Rhoda," he said, "would you like to wait for me in the quarry, while I fetch the tea-things."

"No," she said. "I'll come in with you. I must see Jane."

"Will you wear your coat?" She shook her head. She would keep as she was until the evening. She would be as she had been during that first instant of realisation. He touched her sleeve shyly as they crossed the bridge. A smile shivered on her lips. They glanced into the quarry to make sure that there would be a good place for a fire.

"Sticks or methyated?" he asked.

"Sticks," she said. "They give a nicer taste.

"You'll have to wrap up well, Rhoda?"

"I shan't feel cold," she said. "I'm a woman. I'm not a delicate little thing, like you great strong men. "Now, tea."

It was past five o'clock when they brought the tea-things to the quarry. They had then to search for sticks in the wood. Rhoda laid and lit the fire. She had the knack of sheltering the match-flame with her hands. ●

"Who taught you that, Rhoda?" he asked. He was pricked by a sudden fear, half jealousy, of an unknown man in her life.

"Taught me? It's a natural gift," she said. "It's like poetry or ping-pong and other natural gifts. You can't teach a woman to hold a match. Bless the man." He made up a snug corner for her away from the wind. The wind was dropping with the sun. The light was deepening. It was like a rich old man. The shadows were stretching towards the brook. The cock-pheasants had begun to call outside the covert. The cooing of the wood-pigeons took a meaning from the evening. It was no longer a part of the talk of the wood. It was personal with message from the fire in things. It knocked, and came into the heart. Lionel, touching Rhoda's arm, caused her to look across the slope to the field beyond the brook. The ears of a black rabbit were cocked there, above the grass. The alertness of the creature made it elvish. Lionel smiled. "I wonder if that's melanism," he said, "or some boy's joke. I wish life sharpened our wits to that point. It doesn't. It only frets our nerves." He took Rhoda's arm. "Now you're to sit in the corner, there," he said. "And have this rug about you." He tucked it about her. She liked the caring. He waited on her tenderly. She ate and

drank in her heart. His face looking down at hers, with that strange new look, which brought the blood to her cheek, was life from the source to her. Invisible fire passed from one to the other. Rhoda's bent, blushing face, the beauty of her outstretched arm, her firm white fingers, the charm of her pose, so natural, yet with so much thought in it, so much sensitiveness to beauty, were eyebright upon all the blindness in him. She shut her eyes, trembling. She felt his hand at hers, drawing her cup from her. There came the chink of a cup sliding upon its saucer as he put it down. Half opening her eyes, she saw him through a film of lashes, kneeling at her feet. He had her hands in his. She closed her eyes at the warm contact. She drooped away from him, with a quivering mouth.

"Rhoda. Rhoda."

She struggled to speak, but her heart was too full. The impulse to speech translated itself into a shrinking pressure of her hands. She felt her hands drawn against his heart. She longed to hear his voice again. She longed for his love to come round her, to the extinction of her trembling in flame. Drawing one hand loose she caressed his fingers with a little shy frightened touch. Stooping he kissed her fingers. She kissed where his lips had touched her. There was a humility in the act which shamed.

"Oh, Rhoda." He laid her hands at her side, and walked a few paces from her. He stood there, biting his lips, staring at a heaven of washed-out blue, almost colourless now from the light of the sunset, a watery pale light, fast deepening to glow.

He took her hands again. She was cold. She was shuddering. He lifted her gently. She crept in to him like a dumb thing, her eyes fast shut, her mouth quivering. He was touched. He realised for the first time how little life had taught him of the emotional nature of

women. He held her gently to him. She breathed fast, like a creature out of breath. Once she moved her face with a little caressing movement against his shoulder. One hand held the lapel of his coat. He touched the hand tenderly. He saw the shut eyes quiver. A little gleam of a smile came upon the corner of the mouth.

"You're cold, dear," he said. He said it with a great tenderness. Afterwards it struck him as so unlike the things which a hero says in books. He was trembling. His teeth were chattering. He touched her cold cheek.

"Rhoda, dear. You're cold."

"I am cold," she answered, faintly. "But I don't mind. I don't mind." A minute or two passed. She seemed to waken out of a dream. She put him from her with gentle dignity. She stood, taking in deep breaths. He watched her wide-eyed. His mouth was twitching. She passed her hand over her forehead, touching her hair. Her eyes were strange. Her face was exalted. She glanced at him. She could not face the look in his eyes. Her eyes fell. When she raised them it was to stare out across the brook to the valley beyond. Her face was very wan; the lips were white. He came nearer, holding her jacket. He helped her to put it on. His hands rested lightly on her shoulders. Flame ran through her, with a stab of delight, that this strong man was taking possession. She shut her eyes for an instant.

"Life is kind, Rhoda."

"Kind," she repeated. "Kind." His arm linked her arm in his. She pressed it to her side with a little swift shudder.

"Will you come with me, Rhoda?" He was drawing her out of the quarry into a glowing world. She nodded, swallowing. They passed out of the Place of

Blossom. Some rabbits which had crept from the wood hedge to nibble the grass near shelter turned, hesitated, and scampered back. A blackbird broke covert with a cry. Rhoda stopped, with a wan smile at all that scampering life.

Two fields further on they entered the wood through a gap made for the beaters during the autumn. The wood anemones were out of the sun, now. They were closed. The wood was out of the sun, save for a few bright branches high aloft. The lovers wandered on, up a path, their faces upturned. They looked above them at the glow in heaven. As happens at rare times in life the beauty of the day became a part of the beauty in them. All things were notes in the music. This sudden realisation made all things real. This understanding was not limited to the person whose touch was so near and so warm, in the physical presence just at hand. It roved over nature, crushing her essence on joy's palate. It spread, it grasped, it assimilated. The lovers were too full of joy for speech. They understood. They knew. To Rhoda, every branch, every bird, every closed trembling flower, was the child of her moment to be taken in, and kissed and kept, intimately hers for ever. To Lionel there came a sense of intellectual power. He had never felt like that before. He wondered if it would last. He understood at last (he thought) man's place in nature. All this wood was his servant, all the world was his slave.

"I want to look down on the world," he said.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. Look down on it."

"From the top."

"From the top of all."

"In spite of the Britons?"

"Dear. This will consecrate."

"It shall be there, dear?"

"Yes. There," she said. They moved on, up the hill.

As they passed from the wood to the patch of grass, the sun was setting. Lover's time is swift time. He runs, he flies. All those golden sands had run. It was nearly seven. Down in the valley a trail of white smoke drew itself noiselessly across the landscape. "Your train," said Rhoda, smiling.

"Yes. My train," he answered. He stood to watch it go, thinking of the joy life held for him. He felt the little shuddering pressure of the arm in his. He looked at the Sacred Grove. The glow of light gave the trees the intensity and precision of bronze. They were still, now that the wind had fallen. They glowed out, over the hill, as though they had been cast in metal, in the mould of some sharp artificer.

"There is nobody there," he said, glancing down at her. He wanted her not to feel afraid. He wanted her trust. They would be alone on the hill-top, utterly alone. He wanted her to realise this. They were entering a new world, side by side, heart to heart. He would be very gentle with her. They would be hand in hand there.

"Rhoda, dear. You know what it means? On the hill-top there?" She hid her face. She answered, in a low voice, turned away from him.

"Yes. I know, Lionel."

"And you will trust? You will know that . . . that I care, Rhoda."

"Come," she said. His feet quickened from her impulse.

The grove was silent, but for the rabbits. They scattered off, hearing the coming feet. The pair reached the edge of the ditch, just as the last rabbit, unused to men, loped slowly to ground below them. They stood by a little hawthorn bush, which was green with the first brightness of young leaf. Rhoda plucked two shoots. She gave one of them to Lionel, and ate the other.

"Our sacrament," she whispered, shyly smiling at him.

"Dear Rhoda." They stood hand in hand, eating that body and blood of April.

"And now let us enter the grove," he said.

"From this side," she answered. They were to the east.

"Yes," he said.

"Facing the sun," she said.

"Yes, dear."

"Let us go down together." She turned to him, looking him full in the face, with her frank grey eyes. Then very swiftly, she bent and kissed his hand with that humbleness which had shamed him so before. His arm was round her. She leaned against it with that ecstasy in finding a strong support which none but the girl who has been lonely knows to the full. With a little frightened sob, she clung to his arm, pressing to him. Then raising her face she spoke again.

"Down together." She clung to him, trusting to him (her eyes closed) as he helped her down the slope into the ditch.

It was darker in the ditch. They were shut away from the world there. They were out of sight of life. From very far away a sheep called. There was a cawing of rooks somewhere, as though the wood clapped hands at the sun's exit. Otherwise it was still there, lonely. They were in one of the world's secret places. They were alone. The gloom of the trench gave a chill to their mood. The cold of the red earth, littered with twigs, in the lightlessness of a spring sunset, from which the warmth had gone, made them feel that this, too, was life, as well as the ecstatic mood of the climbing of the hill. They were alone together, two human souls, given to each other now, pledged to have interests in common, a body in common, a life in common, body

and body's guest. They would have this earth against them sometimes, the earth, the broken boughs and the lightlessness. And however much they loved each other, however much joy they brought to life from their communion, that would await them in the end. Cold earth, and littered twigs and lightlessness. A little wood-mouse came out of his hole with a weak squeaking. He moved so quickly that he was a visible motion in the leaves, not a distinct object. His faint squeak was one of Nature's thinnest ditties, but it brought out other flittering mice. The sight of him made Lionel's pressure on her arm reassuring. The smile came upon her face again. Lionel's arm drew her more closely to him. Her breathing shook her.

"Shall we go up the mound?" he asked.

"Wait one instant," she breathed. Then—"Lionel, Lionel, I am ready." He helped her up the mound to the top. She stayed there, holding to a tree, facing to the sun with shut eyes. The sun was dipping now. His red disc was cut across by threads of intense gold cloud. The west was orange, with that promise of reddening which foretells fine weather. Under the west, the landscape's watery grey was luminous. The hills on the horizon were dim butterfly blue. The three pines in Ponton wood bronzed and sombred. They were captains there, Roman captains, bloody from conquest. A few faint clouds rose above the colour of the lowest heaven like infinitely distant peaks. Water in the valley gleamed steel. Smoke rose above the village. Woods were dim. The world was unreal with haze. Only in this high place was the glow un conquered. It flushed the trees still. They reddened under it. Ponton was an ember glowing, though on Ponton's eastern side it was already twilight. Shadow was there, chillness, emptiness of light, the sense that April after sunset is early March.

Rhoda's hand sought his. "Come," she said. They set out together to the western point. Afterwards they had no memory of those last few paces. Their minds were in the past and in the future: the present was not. They stood together there an instant, on the flattened mound top, watching the sun sink. The last of the glow was intense upon their faces.

"Rhoda, darling."

"Lionel." She raised her face. She looked at him out of half-shut eyes. It seemed to him that her face was the face of one made suddenly old with pain. He caught her hands. He drew them to his heart for a moment. Then, as she swayed towards him with blind eyes, his hands took her shoulders.

"Rhoda. Beloved. Beautiful Rhoda."

She drooped to him. Her hands laid themselves limply to rest upon his sleeves. Half opening her eyes as she yearned against him she murmured something. Her touch upon his arm, her last conscious effort, forced him to turn a little.

"In the sun," she murmured. "In the sun." He saw her mouth half smile, as he obeyed. He saw her lashes half lift again in a second of desire to see his face in that instant. They quivered down. She could not. She was blind, she was dumb, she was his. She was a white, sighing thing who clung to him, yearned to him, mouth on mouth. Something in the whiteness of the moment made him murmur "Sacred. Sacred. Sacred." She needed that word. A little shy hand trembled among his hair, pressing him to her. Earth died at that. His eyes closed. The light grew intenser. They clasped the universe. All joy, all music, all colour, circled and flowed in them. The flower of life opened to them, spilling perfume, spilling light. They entered the heart of the rose, they took the vows of the rose, they became the rose. The last of

the glow made them immortals, ruddy with a burning blood.

The great copper moon, rising from the dimness beyond the valley, beheld them there still, in Ponton Grove, consecrating a little earth with something from beyond the stars. Shyly a star or two crept to silver upon the sky. An owl floated down the valley like a great moth. Bats were aloft. Their chittering sounded. A late blackbird carolled.

"Lionel."

"Yes, beloved."

"You care, Lionel?"

"Rhoda, beloved Rhoda. I love you, Rhoda."

"Isn't it wonderful, Lionel?"

"Yes, beloved. Oh, Rhoda. Rhoda. Rhoda, you are beautiful, Rhoda."

"Ah."

"Kiss me, Rhoda."

"My Lionel."

"You love me, Rhoda?"

No answer this time, only that sudden dog-like humbleness as she caught his hand to her lips.

The moon climbed up into heaven. The copper of her burning smouldered in the blueness, pearling as she rose. Presently she was white in heaven, silvering the world, making all wan. Down in the valley two lovers were lingering home. Behind them, clear in the stillness, the voice of the brook called, not like a bird now, but like a spirit, a complaining spirit, a spirit lonely in the valley, lonely, no one talking. The water crooned there, gurgled, cried. No one came to it, no one came to it. It was lonely, lonely. The hurrying water gurgling, going, quickly going. And anon a promise, anon a mourning.

All the valley was full of the voice of the water. The

lovers lingered to hear. They lingered on the bridge. They clung together on the bridge. "Here, where it all began, beloved. Oh, my beloved, my beloved."

A water-rat (or was it an otter?) slipped into the brook with a little splash. They saw a head at the point of a V of ripples. It passed on, on, down stream, setting little waves of silver to wash the banks. The trout in the eddy flogged the water a wallop. In the grass below the wood the rabbits gathered. There were scurrings, beatings on the ground, a buck's squeal.

"Lionel."

"Yes, dear."

"Dear?"

"Beloved."

"Isn't it beautiful?"

"Beautiful."

"The place of blossom now, dear. And then good-night."

"There will be no real parting, Rhoda. Never again."

"No," she answered. "Never again."

In the place of blossom they stumbled on a tea-cup. They laughed together. Lionel knelt upon the ground and kissed her feet.

"Oh, Lionel, Lionel."

Groping with one hand he plucked white violets. He stood, shaking, trembling. She felt the fire in him.

"Beloved."

"Yes, Lionel."

"The symbol. White violets. The symbol of to-day."

"Yes, Lionel."

"Let them be in our kiss, beloved." Their mouths crushed the violets. They were earth's white fire.

"Lionel. Lionel," she murmured. The moth-like owl, floating down the hedge for mice, wavered as he

saw them. An owl in the pine-tree, crying a strange cry, broke out a-hooting.

Down the brook, in the wide, far reach, where it becomes a river, the water was silver, silver, a mile of silver. It was flowing on under the moon, under the stars, going on to the sea. Fish rose, fish rushed, fish leapt. It flowed on, white, white, going on to the sea. Plain in mid-stream, its neck pointing as it circled, a bottle floated, "like some grave, mighty thought threading a dream."



BOOK II

CHAPTER I

LIONEL disbelieved in the Church. He felt that she needs re-organising, re-fitting, almost re-creating, if she be to help the soul of man to life, through these difficult centuries of mental triumph. But since she has the law on her side, a kind of conformity is necessary. Marriage in a church has a certainty about it. Marriage before a registrar unfits one for provincial life. A registrar is as good a marrier as a parson, yet to country nostrils he leaves a whiff of brimstone about the lady's skirts. It is a matter of tradition, perhaps; of "desert being a beggar born." A yeomanry captain is as much a captain as the other: yet there is a glamour about the Household Regiments. So Lionel consented to be married in a church, by a clergyman. He would not go further than that. He refused to submit to any of the costly mummary by which a rite both beautiful and simple is made vulgar among us. If he were to be married by the Church, it should be in the living Church, not by the present, dead, expensive substitute for Christian action. He chose a mean, grey-stone church in Hoxton. He felt that it represented all that was living in our Christianity. "Nothing but the love of God," he thought, "could force people into a building so hideous."

It was a very "low" church. The choir (he went there one Sunday) sang to the harmonium. A lady played, not very well. The service dragged. They had both Litany and Communion service. The clergyman looked over-worked. He did not intone.

Lionel was much depressed by the service. He was depressed by the starved look of the congregation. They were white-faced. They were in want of air, in want of blood. They looked as though life had poisoned them. A few weary-looking boys twitched and fidgeted, bored to the bone. The matrons tinkled with beads. But there was an earnestness in the men and in the clergyman that impressed him deeply. The horrible little windows were all shut. A coloured motto over the chancel arch declared that "This is the House of God." Lionel thought of Agave gone mad on the hills. He looked from death's head to death's head in the congregation, thinking that it had taken twenty centuries of Christianity to bring us so far upon the road.

He was married there at the end of June. He was married in his "ordinary" clothes. So was Rhoda. He swore that he would not marry otherwise. His friends, the Cartwrights, with whom he had stayed in India, during the famine relief time, supported him. Dora came with Rhoda. Rhoda's father drove up, red and swearing, in a cab, as they were leaving the church after the wedding. He explained that the blasted cabman had taken him to the wrong church. He caught at Lionel's hand and said something about Gobbless you. Lionel was hot and petulant. They were all in the road. He wanted to get away. Half a dozen people had gathered, to stare. Their chins dropped, like idiots' chins. There was no more vitality in the stare than would stock a figure in a poster. "Come along, Rhoda," he said, "let's get out of this." He bundled her into her father's cab. "Get out of this, quick," he called to the cabman. "Paddington." He settled down beside his wife as the cabman whipped up. "Good Lord," he said, "people make this business of marriage as beastly as divorce. Good Lord. Good Lord, Rhoda. Your father ought to be shot." Something told him

that this was not the way to talk to a newly-married wife. He shut-to the doors. Her hand lay nerveless on her lap. He caught it. It closed on his hand with a timid pressure. "Well, Rhoda," he said. He smiled grimly. She did not answer him. She was too full of emotion. She smiled faintly. Rousing herself, she realised how they had stolen her father's cab. The humour of it was mingled with a natural prudence.

"You'll have to pay father's fare," she said, "as well as ours."

"Lord, yes," he answered. "Half a crown. Brute." He reflected on it. "But he's in tight boots," he went on, "and it's a mile to a cab-rank."

"I was wondering," she said, "what he was like when he married my mother."

"Like?" Lionel asked. "He was like an occasion for restoratives. Most bridegrooms are, it seems."

Lionel's teeth gritted at the thought of the obsolete indignities of marriage, of wedding breakfasts and the like. "Here," he called, "where on earth's this fellow taking us." He thrust up the little hatch in the roof of the cab. "Round to the left," he shouted. "Round to the left. And then round to the right." The cabman said something half aloud about the blastedness of the completely blasted. The horse came round, with every reason for agreement.

"Look here, dear wife," said Lionel, suddenly tender. His nerves were jumping him from mood to mood. "Look here, dear." He was silent again. The tenderness was not spoken.

"Yes," she said. He put his hand on her shoulder and looked at her. Fearing that she would not like this, in the sight of the world, he withdrew his hand. He was worried. She was shut up in a carefully built room to which he had no key. He saw her as it were looking out of the window of that room. "We are man

and wife," he said to himself, "and we have been civilised into different genera. What in the world is she thinking of? What is going on inside her head?" The cab stopped outside the station. They got out, and entered the hotel.

Rhoda sat down in the foyer, while Lionel wrote in the register. She was suddenly conscious that she was entering life with a creature of whom she knew nothing. Lionel was as strange to her as the hotel servant at the desk. What were men like? What was Lionel like? Lionel put down the pen. He came to her. He sat at her side. His eyes were very kind, but his face had the troubled look which came with bodily weariness and mental strain. "Well, dear wife," he said. His voice was very tender. No one was near them. The men at the desk were sorting a stack of letters which a postman had handed to them a moment before. The postman was now passing through the swing doors into the street. Rhoda saw that he had a fair moustache.

"Rhoda," Lionel said, "you're wondering what men are like. They're very like women. Only they pass their lives in a playing field, while you pass yours in a boudoir, looking on. You mustn't be afraid of me. You're just as big a mystery to me, as I am to you. And I'm just as much afraid of you, as you are of me. Only in a different way, perhaps. You'll have to learn about the playing field, and I'll have to learn about the boudoir. We have to teach each other. Only you'll remember, dear, that I'm only a human being like yourself. We're both that, first of all. And you'd like to go to your room to lie down. I'll send a maid up to you, with some tea."

She thanked him with a look. He walked over to the desk for the key of her room. A small boy appeared with the key. Rhoda followed the boy. She gave Lionel a wan smile as she stepped into the lift. Lionel

watched her go. He gave orders for tea and chocolates to be taken to her room. Then he walked out into the Park, along the Serpentine to the bridge, and then along the road as far as the Albert Memorial. He turned, near the gate, and walked back over the bridge, towards Oxford Street. Near the guard-house he found himself thinking that all experience is valuable, that perhaps even an unpleasant thing (like a wedding) has its value to the soul. He thought of children. Unlike most men, he desired children. He thought of living in a pleasant old English farmhouse near a brook. It was Rhoda's farmhouse. He thought of himself wandering along the brook with his boys, sailing toy boats under the bridge where he and Rhoda had thrown stones at the bottle. His boys. They would have Rhoda's eyes. And perhaps there would be a girl, a little like himself. He sat down on one of the benches on the walk. There would be children. The physical side of marriage was ugly, he thought, without children. And more important than children was cleanness. In his thought he was contemptuous of women. "They cannot think. They've not been trained to think. And they've contrived to keep men's thoughts upon themselves. And they've played the devil, and taught men to play the devil." He watched the sparrows in the grass on the other side of the road. There were a dozen there. They had food there, seeds or insects. They were pecking. Hopping in little hops and pecking.

"Man has been doing that," he muttered. "Doing it for fifty centuries. Hopping in little hops and pecking. We've been waiting for an act of will to put the sparrow in us in its place."

He remembered Rhoda's words. "I was wondering what he was like when he married my mother." He blessed her for the thought. The red-faced, drunken man had once been a woman's hero, standing strong

and fine beside her, in a church full of friends. "Men ought not to forget that," he thought. "The woman doesn't." He reflected that he ought to keep his memories of the day very perfect. It was a strange thing, this married life. It went on, sometimes, for sixty years. He knew of an old, old couple in Ireland. He had seen them when he was a child. The Henrysons of Castle Henry. An old, old man, an old, old woman, sitting in a sunny room, on the anniversary of their wedding day. They had been married for sixty years, twice as long as he had lived. They kept the day still. They had married in the Regency. Who had been at the wedding? What had they said to each other as they drove off into life sixty golden years back? What did they say to each other, that night sixty years after, when the guests had gone and they were in the dark together? They talked of their wedding day. "Why, it is all we get in life," he cried. "This is my great day. Sixty years hence we shall be looking back on it together. Our grandchildren will call us blessed. God grant us a good pilgrimage."

He prayed that he might be like old Henryson. Marriage was a very grand thing when it was so perfect as that. Henryson had made modern life bear fruit. He had tasted and taken life's abundance. He had been wealthy in life. He had come to life as a reaper comes to a cornfield. Life's abundance. People talked of all manner of new joys. The Bible is a better guide. They are wise in the East, here we are experimental.

He thought of the children who might be born to him. "My mind must be about her through it all," he thought. He hated the modern fear of life. "It's better that man should be born. There's no life so foul that it has not its minute. It's better that people should have children. Life is incomplete without them. Some women do without. They have that other idea of the

sanctity of their bodies. They make the world their child."

A cab was coming down the road towards him. A woman was in the cab. He saw that she was Mrs. Drummond. "She has made the world her child," he thought. Her face looked very sweet behind her veil. She was gazing gravely, straight ahead of her, thinking gentle thoughts. He had seen her face eager and sad, but never peaceful, before. He wondered what long-gone happiness had given her peace. "I've never got to Coln St. Michael," he thought sadly. "We never had that talk after all."

He rose to salute her, as the cab went by; but she did not see him. He saw the rake of her hat, the veil making a silveriness over her face, and the poise of her slim, firm shoulders. Her figure seemed to sway a little to the movement of the cab. Then she was gone.

He sat down again to his thoughts. Perhaps they were not his thoughts, but the thoughts of many long dead ancestors whose high emotions had left their mark on the race. He realised now that Marriage is a tremendous spiritual adventure. It means more to the world than the other big things, birth and death. Ancestral memories moved him. He thought of all the love of the past which had gone to give him life. What was his mother like when she married his father? His mother had stood in a church, even as he had stood. "No, she had faith," he muttered. He felt her by him on the bench, the long-dead, beautiful woman. He wished that she were alive to be by him in the flesh. The marriage of a child is one of life's last sacraments. She should have been spared for that. "Dead, beautiful mother, who was gentle to me when I was little."

She had moved on the earth, glad of the sun, living and giving life. Life went on still, the sun shone, the

rain fell, the earth spun. He thrilled with the thought that the game of life goes on for ever. "To-morrow will come through me," he said. His mother must have thought so, years ago, in that old Irish house up the glen, within sight of the sea. Some day he must take Rhoda there. His old uncle lived there. Perhaps in one of the box rooms in the attics he would find a trunk containing all her wedding garments; for she had kept them, no doubt. The old white satin, the orange-flowers, the wreck of what had been roses. She had been as full of joy and trust and hope as Rhoda. Now she lay in the earth, poor mother. She could not even lay fresh camphor in those old bridal things, to keep her supreme day from the moth.

Mary Drummond had been married; "twice," Sir Patrick said, "both times tragically." Now she drove alone, in a cab, getting peace out of a memory. He felt inclined to cry out like the thief in Chaucer. What is this Marriage? Many of the best people never tried it. Scores of the noblest women never married. Where would they get men good enough? Rhoda had married. Poor little Rhoda. He felt very tender to her. He was all that she had in the world; she was all that he had; they were two little lonely souls pledged to make something of life together. The world seemed very big and fierce, suddenly. For the first time in his life he felt a little afraid. "The world can be very cruel," he muttered. He did not mind for himself: but he was no longer alone. "World, you can hit me through her." The thought, pursued a little further, told him that the world could hit her through him. He was weary. Woman's nerves are so strange. Was there anything in his nature which could make her stiffen with repulsion? He did not know what she loved in him, nor what she asked of him. What did she know of him? Yet they were pledged to live together and

keep together till one of them died, it might be sixty years hence.

He must be tender to her. He walked towards the gate. He would go to the hotel to take care of her. They ought to be together on their wedding day. They would have that tenderness to look back upon through all the years. She must learn not to be afraid of him.

As he went, he was conscious of bodily weariness. He had been living at an intolerable strain. The worry of the engagement, the making of a home, and the building up of his schemes had racked him. His nerves were all fretted and fretting. He wished that he had not persuaded Rhoda to come to Las Palmas for the honeymoon. His body cried out for rest. He was seventeen hundred miles from rest. Why had he added that strain to the strain of marriage? He told himself that he wanted a change. He could not stand London. Six months of London, after life in the wilds, would sicken any man. He had been there nearly eight. He thrust his fatigue from him. He told himself that the morrow would be a new day. The fever and strain would be forgotten. He would be with Rhoda on a reeling, sea-bright deck watching France climb out of the sea.

Chocked against the rail, holding their hats, they would see the topgallant fo'c'sle rear aloft and plunge down, burying the anchors in glitter. Gulls would come past. Fire-bright spray would leap and thud. "Whee-ew. Whee-ew," the gulls would cry. It would be a memory for ever, that flight of the gulls, poised by the rail in air. Then presently they would sight the strange red crags of the island. Las Palmas, the town of his happiest holiday. They would step ashore to a new life. Las Palmas! Spoken slowly, the words seemed to mean more than Round Pond and Welsh Harp, waters of Damascus.

Rhoda was in bed, in pain, when he reached the hotel. A haggard ghost of her managed to get into the boat-train the next morning. She sat back in a corner, very white and shivery. It was a stifling journey. On getting aboard the steamer, she complained that she felt sick. The smell of paint was too much for her. Her cabin opened, west-coast fashion, on to the spar deck. Lionel persuaded her to turn in, and to leave the door upon the hook.

The ship was not quite ready to sail. Rhoda lying in her bunk suffered from the noise of winches working at all three hatches. People came to the cabin, continually. They dropped the hook with a clatter, pushed in, carrying bags, exclaimed, "Oh, I beg your pardon," and pushed out again, clacking the hook. In the next cabin a frightened dog was yelping. Forward, at the hatch, a Scotch voice asked a Mr. Baxter what kind of a bluidy shinnannikin he was playing at down there. "There was only one bluidy sling in a bluidy ten meenits." The clatter of the winch quickened; the blocks whined. Then came the orders "Hoist," and "Stand from under," followed by the r-r-r-rop of slings tumbling on to bales. The ship's bell beat a clatter overhead; the siren hooted. The screws began their trampling, driving her out. Soon they had settled to their beat. The ship was forging ahead, into the Channel, lifting to the sea. Rhoda, lying in her bunk, saw that her curtains had a rhythm as well as an oscillation.

Late that afternoon the wind drew ahead and the sky came down. After a few pelting squalls it settled into real dirt. Before tea time things had begun to fetch away. Before dinner the ship began to take it in in the forward well. She was badly stowed and badly steered. She made heart-breaking weather of it. Lionel hung to windward. His mackintosh dipped with spray. There

was a wet of salt all over his face. From time to time he beat up, to see how Rhoda felt. She, poor girl, lay in the lower bunk, deathly sick and ill. It was a miserable beginning of married life. Her illness took from her every trace of personality. She was cold, infinitely wretched clay, in pain, in misery. Though she was shivering with cold she felt stifled for want of air. Though she wanted Lionel, his presence filled her with terror. She lay for long hours, half-unconscious. Whenever her eyes opened she saw the curtain over the bull's eye inclining gingerly inboard, as though on sea-legs, at each lee-roll. It paused at the point of the roll, and then steadied back, to flop against the brass with a click of rings. When her eyes closed, she felt her body making the same response. Her mouth felt as though some one long ago had lit a fire of brown paper in it; but long, long ago, so long ago that only the ashes and the smoke remained. In the cabin next to hers, a sea-sick terrier whimpered all night in the upper bunk. He made a human noise. It was like a hurt child. "O, O, O." It was sad. It was heart-breaking.

Down in the bay the ship nosed into it in style. She butted into the green, and took it "that colour" all along her. She quivered and stopped. Tons of water came aboard. The blows of the seas were like hammers on her heart. There would come a deadening wash, like death upon her. Then came a pause, that half second of pause, during which one wonders "will she rise?" Then with a whickering and welter, heard above the roar of the gale, she hove up and butted on. Whack went her screws as she chucked her stern out, and set them racing. Groans and cries came from along the line of cabins. The doors clacked at their hooks. Washboards were in the doorways. Stewards sidled at acute angles. Stewardesses passed, stirring hot lemonade. Whiffs of tobacco smoke blew aft from the watch on deck. The

figures on the bridge stood with their chests against the canvas, staring into the dirt ahead. It was dirt ahead, all dirt, solid dirt. It came out of the night, black and grim, with a steady roar, which startled. It was as though the night had put down her shoulder to heave the ship back. Millions of yapping white hands rose up, and yapped, showing fangs, and raced away aft, in the glitter cast by the lights. Below, in the steerage, long since battened down, those who weren't too sick were drunk. They were pounding at the doors, amid the stink and filth and fleas. The supper had long since fetched away. It lay in a mess, cluttered in its pannikins, to leeward. Lionel, going aft, heard a roaring as of wild beasts below him. Songs, oaths, screams of women, groans of the sick. Hell was loose down in the steerage. He fought his way back to Rhoda. She moaned a little and asked if there were any danger. She shuddered under his touch as he put her pillow straight. He did what he could to comfort. Dimly, he sensed that she was terrified of being alone with him.

"I shall sleep on the settee," he said. "Call me if I can help." He tucked her in with an extra blanket. Then wrapping himself with the adroit whisk of an old campaigner, he settled down on the settee. He did not sleep there. His thought was that he was at sea for life with a creature about whom he was ignorant. This side of woman's life had been shut from him. He lay awake for a long time wondering why boys are not trained for marriage. They are trained for cricket; they are trained for pheasant-shooting. They are trained for everything but companionship with a finer nervous system. The gale roared aloft. The forward well was full. Rising from his couch to look to Rhoda, he found her crying, with wide eyes. She was frightened and cold. She shrank from him. The shrinking

stiffened every line of her with loathing. Going on deck he sent a stewardess to her.

He stayed on deck, watching the green gleam scattered from the side light on to marching seas. Out there in the gale a wife seemed an impertinence. One wanted a comrade, somebody who wouldn't flinch, a help, a rallying point. Afterwards he stood in an alleyway while the stewardess reported to him, calling aloud in his ear. "Called the doctor," she shouted. He nodded with comprehension. "Easier when we reach Lisbon." He nodded again. When he went again to the cabin Rhoda called to him to leave her alone.

CHAPTER II

IN London there are many hideous buildings which atone for their want of beauty by their size. It is something to be merely big and strong. Even in the daylight these buildings are impressive. One cannot look at them without awe. He who looks up at them from below experiences a thrill, which is partly fear, partly reverence. Reverence for the majesty of the mind which overcame so much matter. Fear for the personality of the matter informed by the mind which overcame it. All buildings have personality. But the "crag of building," which only comes from the brooding of a mind, and the attention of a myriad of minds, prolonged, perhaps, for many months, has about it a mystery of inner life, which speaks, or is at point to speak, to all. Life looks out of it. The windows are eyes, the door a mouth. Along roof and dripstone, along sill and cornice, runs the manifold whisper of its being, inarticulate but terrible, charged with the strength of many lives. At night, when the streets cease to be restless, when the presence of the multitude no longer gives them a dignity, the personality of these buildings dominates the dark. The balefires of the windows burn. The crag becomes a monster charged with power upon the soul.

There are many such buildings in London. There are streets which lie in wait. There are corners where the passions lurk. There are lifting roads which catch the heart to the sky, as though the street opened out of heaven infinitely far up the hill. In obscure corners there are Oriental things, African things, suggestions of mosques and orange groves, the dust, the glare, brazen

death burning. In some places there comes a pluck at the heart, with the sense that the sea is round the corner. The sea with her ships, the ships full of spices, coming out of the East with spices, coming from the sun with perfume, crushing bubbles as they come. In other streets there are forts of flats, guarding hovels. Elsewhere there are streets like the streets in dreams. One goes down them wondering what lies at the turn, what romance, what adventure.

But every street is burnt into the brain of somebody. There is a tragedy and a passion in every house. There is no room in London but is a passionate memory in a mind. One cannot pass a house without the feeling that here is a temple consecrated by man's thought to the use of all that is divine in man, the ritual of life, the sacrament of love, birth's miracle, death's mystery. No need for churches, and the repetition of formulæ by people paid to repeat them. Each house is a church of the Holy Ghost, each human soul is a priest. A higher ritual goes on in the brain than ever was performed in church. In the brain life is at work on matter. In a church, life confesses its incompetence.

Among the monstrous blocks of flats standing in those parts of London which are not too far from the pleasure grounds there is one most monstrous. It is the highest residential building within the four-mile radius. It towers up for many stories of flats on the top of the high ground of St. John's Wood. It is called Burning Mansions. The errand-boys of the local tradesmen call it Bunny Mansions.

Where it stands, it catches all the winds, even the north wind, broken by Hampstead. It stands up on the hill like an Acropolis. The winds smite it from all sides. It is one of the few buildings which can be said to dominate the town. It commands a mighty stretch of London. From the turret angle of the highest flat,

one can look west and south, over a wilderness of building which seems to go on for ever. It is all smoky and defiled, of a luminous grey when the sun shines, this prospect from Burning Mansions. When it rains, it is a study of the cheerless. At night it is one of the sights of London. Standing there on the leads outside the topmost flat one can see over the night for miles. The darkness is lit by many eyes. Far to the south is the glare in the lift over Oxford Street. Westward, more eyes gleam and go, on the way to the horizon. Here and there are lights in a line, marking a road. In other places there are brightnesses about a hall, a dust of light in the air. Standing on the leads watching the darkness, the city seems to moan. Out of all the welter and thunder there comes, at times, something like the cry of a hurt thing, the moan of something big and blind, turning over. Then the moan dies away into the muttering, and the muttering drones away into the night, as though the world were grinding on its axle.

Very late at night, in the silence, when even the cabs have gone, the light of the lamps gleams on the windows of Burning Mansions, as the traveller goes by. The gleam lights up and dies, as though, wandering within there, a spectre struck the ghost of a light. When day begins to colour the sky the high up eastern windows brighten. Over the tops of the trees they brighten. The lookers-on, hurrying to early work, get from their brightening some sense of what the peaks of the world may be, solemn under the snows, high-lifted over Asia.

In the daytime, Burning Mansions lifts its immense bulk grandly. The red of its brick is bright. The points of the turrets are sharp against heaven. You catch the majesty of the maker's thought. The germ of the scheme has come to stone in so many places. There are chateaux in Burgundy, castles in the west of Scotland. Here you have the ideas of many feudal

centuries applied to a bigger age. You have a chateau like a palace in Babylon. It is big enough for a hundred flats. It rises up like a hill. Yet it is all proportioned. The justice of its proportion does not strike at first. One sees the great red crag. Afterwards, in the awe, comes the joy which all fine achievement brings.

The greatest triumph of this great house is the tower at the eastern end. Here three flats, one above the other, lift aloft like the great thing's head. All of the house is great. This final rush at heaven is the work of genius. The thought goes spiring up to the topmost story. There it ends in a last perfection, four square, with turrets at the gables.

All who enter Burning Mansions are content for a time. The house is so fair; the prospect, for a while, so big; man's pride of possession so strong. It is when beauty palls, and the sight dims, and the sense of possession weakens, that one shrinks in that great house. Then, hiding in some obscure landing, the place no longer a home, one wonders why one came to live there. One longs, then, for beauty of character, splendour of mental vision, treasures in heaven. One sees, then, that the house has claimed too much, that life has not been life at all, but a giving up of all things for leave to live there. It is a great house, but every great house is a great selfishness, if there are any houseless, as there are. And this great house dominates the soul. It daunts the souls of those who live there. Till at last, as they go up and down the stairs, they learn that they do not matter, that they do not count, that they are nobodies. They learn that they are only the red corpuscles in a body, and that the house is the body. They live, and are red, so that the house may be great. The house rises aloft upon the strength of its inmates.

Lionel had taken the top flat in Burning Mansions. He settled in there, with his wife, a month sooner than

they had planned. They never saw Las Palmas. The honeymoon never passed the first quarter. Rhoda's illness brought the trip to an end at Lisbon. After three days of misery in Lisbon they took ship back to England and settled down in an unready flat which smelt of new paint. Rhoda's illness was serious. The doctor became a daily visitor, a nurse took up her abode with them.

Other worries followed. They made Lionel glad that he was in town to deal with them. His work was more exacting than he had expected. Much had been done; but an infinity remained to do. It seemed to stretch on and on, as work does. He was always lavish of himself when there was work to do. He did not spare himself. London, never kind to workers, added to his worries by racking his nerves. His eyes were heavy in his head. His face began to wear the hopeless look of the overworked.

He was away from home from half-past eight till seven, every day. He came home tired out, sat with Rhoda for a time, then buckled to his work again. Often he wrote far into the night, trying to get things done. Rhoda felt that she was neglected. She was petulant and peevish. She could not see that his neglect of her was justified. She twitted him. He tried to explain that he had involved his fortune in a business, and that he had to carry the business through or lose his money. He was very tired. He spoke confusedly, from a brain too weary to be nicely tactful. There was an edge on his speech which should have warned her. She did not know when to stop. She flicked him on the raw nerve. He was not a patient man; but he was patient with her. He was too weary to be cross. He sighed. Taking down a book of poems he read to her. Afterwards, going to his bed, he reflected that the poets knew very little about life

Though he did not know it, he was going through an experience which comes to all married men. Married life begins, suddenly, without preparation. It is unlike the single life. A person newly married is a person without standards. He or she has everything to re-arrange. The whole of life has to be re-adapted; the outward life and the inner life. All passionate interests suffer check. They are changed, re-directed, compromised. All intimacies end. The old, abundant easy selfishness is stopped, suddenly, by a discipline bound to gall at first. Marriage comes more easily to women than to men. They live in a home until they marry. Marriage sets them free. Men, as a rule, have no home until they marry. Marriage binds them. A few weeks after marriage:—

“O dreadful is the check, intense the agony,
When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see,
When the pulse begins to throb and the brain to think again,
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.”

Looking back on it, long afterwards, when he had attained to that dissatisfaction with youth which maturity (fearing it to be a sign of age) is swift to call wisdom, he saw how wretched those weeks must have been to her. He blamed himself for a want of sympathy. One of the problems of life is to attain a fulness of sympathy. It is nothing more than a capacity for living outside the personality. All largeness of life is sympathy. It is a problem partly physical, to be faced by all who live. For ten extreme hours each day, Lionel gave himself to his work. He spent himself like coin in the effort to make his work succeed. When his day's work was done, nothing of him was left except the unstrung nerves. Nothing was left for Rhoda. How was Rhoda to understand? What is to be done in such cases? Time, never lavish, creates, shall we

say, once a century a special brain. Once in a lifetime he gives that brain its chance. The hour brings on the man. The man marries. Is the world or the wife to suffer? One must be neglected. It is a matter of opinion. Art is a matter of opinion. The world will not suffer much for a little art more or less. The woman may suffer a great deal. There are many ways of presenting the problem.

Lionel enjoyed his work. There is no passion so absorbing as work. It is woman's one dangerous rival. He was harassed by Rhoda's illness. He cared for her. He was tender to her. But life in the flat was a strain. She tried him to the bone. Once, after a bout of nerves, he found himself sighing with relief when his office door shut him from the thought of her. He reproved himself, searching his heart. He had misgivings that it was early in marriage to be finding his work a refuge. Afterwards he felt the relief daily, without misgivings of any kind.

Sometimes, in her good days, he had a glimpse of the old, far away, beautiful time, when she was well. Going from her, after such times, he felt that the world had gone very well in those old days. Rhoda ill was an anxiety. It struck him cold. It was like an injustice of the gods. It was his first intimate anxiety. No real worry had stung him till then. Coming suddenly, as it did, at the moment when he first felt the restrictions of marriage, and longed for a complete freedom, so that he might carry through his work, it cramped his nature. Later, when their nerves had gone to pieces, the fretted invalid touched a raw place in him. He answered tartly. She replied cruelly. Sickness is always unjust. This sickness was more than unjust. It was a denial by life of promises made. Life holds out such promises to lovers. "You will be happy. You will be more than happy." They had believed Life's

promises. They had taken Life's word and Life had cheated them. They had had no happiness, no one little glimmer of happiness. Here, three months after marriage, they took stock of what marriage had brought them. To her, marriage had brought a state of tortured nerves in which the thought and the sight and the touch of the man whom she had married were abominations hardly to be endured. To him, marriage had brought the knowledge that Rhoda was equipped for a boudoir, not for life. He had been tricked by the charm of something new and untried. He had been caught by a little pretty red and white bait agreeably dangled. "Marriage goes on, sometimes, for sixty years."

CHAPTER III

RHODA made a slow recovery. When she was able to get about a little, with a lack-lustre face, she was still nervously ill. When she was not being bitter, she was in tears for having been bitter, or planning (with a sick mind's craft) new cause for bitterness and tears. She could do very little; she was weak still. That was another cause of bitterness. She had been a robust animal. She had never been ill before. With the vindictiveness of the weak she blamed Lionel for her sickness and for the worse thing, the loss of her beauty. Ill-health had played sad tricks with her beauty. It robbed her of the decorations which hid the want of character in her face. A white and bitter woman stared back at her from the glass now. It was Lionel's fault; it was all his doing; going in that disgusting steamer.

The mind in sickness is illogical, mean, suspicious. She was suspicious. Like many women of her class she had vague notions about work. She did not understand this "work" of Lionel's. That it kept him from her, even when she was sick, was cause enough for her to suspect it. He never talked of the work. She brooded alone, day after day, on the fact that he worked in close association with a woman secretary. Her experience as a beauty had taught her that it is not good for man to be alone with a woman. She saw the creature advising. No doubt she liked him. Lionel was attractive to women. She brooded, bitterly jealous, till doubt became certainty.

Sickness is the enemy. Sickness lets in the devil. Sickness arms against us all the lower selves locked up

in our cellars. Some day, in the future, when justice has learnt that the body influences morals, sin will be prescribed for, not sentenced. A little "cutting" with a lancet, a little spurt of blood to the shrunk veins, and the beast is tamed, the devil expelled. She was in the power of one of the lower selves on whom health turns the key. She resolved on a surprise visit to his office, to see this woman. Early in the afternoon of an autumn day, she called upon him. A youth with big ears and what is called a Hapsburg lip told her that Mr. Heseltine was in; but had she got an appointment? She told him "Yes." Eyeing her with suspicion and dislike he showed her in to Lionel's office. On her way through the outer office she noticed the back of a woman in a blouse, bent over a typewriter. The woman's hair seemed to be unduly good "for one in her station." The youth opened an inner door. She went in. Lionel was alone.

His coat was off. He was writing upon a pad. On the floor at his side a dozen typewritten letters, moist from the copying press, were drying. They were like fungi of a new kind. He looked up as she entered, but her entrance did not lift the worry from his face.

"Ah," he said. "It's you, Rhoda. Sit down, dear. I must just finish these instructions. Here's the *Post Meridian*. He handed her a paper, and jerked a chair from the wall for her. "I'm full up," he said. "I must finish these instructions."

He turned to his work again. He jotted notes on a half-written page. He bit the end of his pencil.

A clerk entered, carrying letters. He gave the letters to Lionel, and stood aside, watching the flies on the window. Lionel ripped the letters open with a stiletto, read them through (he swore loudly while reading one) and then appeared to meditate while he tore the envelopes apart, to make sure that they were empty.

He dropped the fragments, one by one, into a waste-paper basket.

"Yes," he said. "Yes." Starting from his reverie, he turned to his clerk. "Come on, now, Andrews." Andrews was ready with pad and pencil. Lionel dictated. "Von Huysum and Cleavers," he said, "look up their address. Take this down." He dictated a long letter, which Andrews took down in shorthand. When it was done, he bade Andrews read it over. Lionel weighed each sentence, making emendations. "That'll do," he said. "Send that off at once. Wait a minute." He pencilled notes on the other letters. "Take these to Miss Coleman," he said. Andrews took the letters. Lionel wrote another note upon his pad, threw the pencil down, and spun round to face his wife.

"I'm sorry, Rhoda," he said, "I'll be free directly." The telephone bell rang. He cursed, took up the receiver and listened. "Yes. Yes," he said, impatiently. "No. No. I tell you it isn't. What's that you say? I can't hear. Not got them? Why haven't you got them? I say. What have you been playing at? You don't know? Who are you?" He muttered impatiently while he waited for an answer. As no answer came, he rang the bell with all the venom of the overwrought. A little metallic sing-song voice came from far away.

"What are you playing at?" he cried in reply. "Are you Wheeler's? Who are you? Well, tell Mr. Wheeler that I'm *Snip Snap*. Tell him to come at once. He's at his dinner? Tell him to drop his dinner." There was a pause. Lionel fidgeted about near the telephone. "These fools will drive me mad," he said. "Idiots. Idiots." The voice spoke again. Lionel's manner changed at once to the genial. "Now, look here, Wheeler," he said, "we all know you're a humourist. What's that?" He laughed. "Well, my dear man,

I'm stuck. I must have them. When will they be ready? Not till Tuesday? I can get them ready made by to-morrow. What? I can. What? You'll let me have three to go on with." He flung down the receiver, swearing. "The brutes have cut me off," he cried. He swirled round the bell handle furiously. "Four five seven nine, Pelham," he shouted. "Why did you shut me off like that? Is that you, Wheeler? Yes. Yes. Well. Three's no good. It must be five or fight. What? Oh, yes. I daresay. I'm not a Christian Martyr. Five. By to-morrow morning, or I cancel the order. You quite understand? What? How did the golf go? I shall expect five, then. Good-bye." He hung up the receiver and turned again to Rhoda.

"This work drives one mad," he said. "How did you get down here?" Before she could answer, William entered with a card. Lionel looked at it. He sighed.

"I must see this man," he said. "Show him into the waiting-room. I'll be out directly. I'm sorry, Rhoda. I daresay he won't be long." He slipped into his coat, patted his hair before a looking-glass, and went out hurriedly. Rhoda was left alone with a telephone, the bell of which rang at intervals as though it would never be old. She picked up the *Post Meridian*. It seemed to be a stupid number. She was tired. The clacking of the typewriter in the outer office jarred upon her. Through the open window she saw the head of a typist bent over a machine in an office across the road. There was a gloss upon the girl's hair.

The office was furnished with a pale, shiny roll-top desk, evidently new. Beside the desk was a table, heaped with papers. Beneath the table, magazines and papers littered the red "plain cloth" linoleum which covered the floor. The room had an air of newness. It had the raw look of a room hired for the making of

something temporary. The white walls glared, the electric light glared, the new waste-paper basket glared. Yes, in spite of the brightness and the shininess the impression given was one of litter. The place was a criticism of the business done there.

There was a paste-pot on the mantel. In one corner, a copying-press stood on a little iron stand. In the middle of the wall, facing the armchair in which she sat, were framed "pulls" of a poster and a contents bill. The poster represented a smiling couple dressed as people are dressed "for the river" in the advertisements of tailors. They were bending towards each other, looking into each other's eyes. Their left hands held between them a copy of a weekly paper. Their right hands, armed with scissors, were cutting this paper in two.

Over the heads of the couple the words *SNIP SNAP* curved in big red letters. Beneath their feet smaller letters defined *Snip Snap* as the New Penny Weekly.

The contents bill showed a rather stronger sense of design. The ground of the bill was blue. The borders were decorated with a pattern of snapping scissors (gules). These scissors, tortured into the shape of letters, contrived to spell the name of *Snip Snap* at the top of the sheet. The centre bore what seemed to be a litter of snowflakes. These snowflakes when looked at more closely proved to be snippets of paper. On each snippet the title of an article to be found in the paper thus:—

LAVINIA'S COURTSHIP,

A true tale of love in high life.

Turning in her chair, Rhoda looked at the other walls. On the wall behind her was the framed "pull" of another poster. It represented a black pirate-flag or

Jolly Roger. In the centre, instead of skull and cross-bones, was a girl's head above a big, open pair of scissors. The head and scissors were printed in red. Below (also in red) was the legend, "rd. *Snip Snap* rd."

Rhoda looked round the office again. The vulgarity of it struck her cold. No single thing there had any word for her. She had never felt so cowed. She had entered, suddenly, a new world. It seemed to her that she was in Yarmouth in the month of August. Some copies of a paper lay in a heap in the fireplace beside her. Their white covers bore the words *Snip Snap* in big blue letters. She thought that they were numbers of the paper. They were the "pulls" of dummies which Lionel had put together before the paper took final form. They were, as it were, "studies" for the new paper. They showed what sort of thing the paper would be. She looked at them.

She soon guessed their nature. The upper copies were made up of blank sheets on which Lionel had written notes and rough sketches. Lower down in the heap were dummies made up of pages cut from other papers. Here and there in the pile were printed specimen numbers, with many marginal notes in Lionel's hand. She turned the leaves of one of these specimen numbers. It seemed to her to be the sort of paper which a shop girl would read on bank holiday. She was struck by the title of the serial, "The Stain on the Panel." She read a little of the story.

"A dead woman.

"For surely that white shape was not alive!

"A dead woman.

"No sound in the richly furnished room. The lamp-light fell on choice examples of marquetric, on the jewelled paper-knife between the leaves of *Figaro*. All was still.

"No sound.

" A dead woman.

" There was an opera cloak upon one of the chairs. Its folds of some warm, clinging material exhaled a faint aroma of patchouli. Could those soft satiny folds speak, what mystery might they not reveal?

" No sound.

" Was she dead?

" Surely that voluptuous shape, those richly tinted cheeks still bearing the hue of health, that magnificent arm, better fitted to sway a fan in some salon of the great than . . ."

The youth who had let her in entered, bearing letters. He advanced in a straight line from the door to the desk, without taking his eyes from her. His stare was not rude, since there was no rude intention. He had no suspicion that his stare might be offensive. He wanted to see the boss's wife. How else could he see her? His ears were so big that they seemed to flap. His mouth hung open, rather. He put the letters on the desk. Catching her eyes upon him he blushed crimson. He stooped to pick from the floor the now dry copied letters. He tested the dryness of each letter by pressing it to his cheek with a big red hand. He read through one or two of the letters, sheepishly grinning. When he had gathered them all, he walked slowly towards the door. Rhoda felt that his head was turned over his shoulder Parthian fashion. She felt his eyes, one on each side of her neck. A fumbling noise from the door-handle told her that he had paused for a last look, holding the door ajar. She was indignant. She rose, turning to him. She was in time to see him slip through the door in a hurry, almost spilling his letters. Afterwards, she saw the outline of his head upon the glass of the door. He was trying to peep through at her.

The outline of the head vanished suddenly. Lionel appeared. He entered hurriedly, in bad humour. " I

must just send a telegram," he said. He tore a form from a book, and left the room with it. Rhoda waited for him.

The place gave her the feeling of pollution. She felt that she could not wear that dress again. She looked from the vulgar poster on the wall to the vulgar story in the fireplace. This was the work which kept Lionel from her. Lionel's work was this. Something which she could not have in the house. And the office, too. She had never before been in an office. She had read about offices in Dickens. She had seen them on theatre stages. She had expected a comfortable room, with an Axminster carpet all bright reds, blues, and greens, and ruddy, solid mahogany furniture. The walls of the office of her fancy were lined with deed-boxes, or with shelves full of law books. She had expected prosperity, waistcoats, gold watch-chains, mutton-chop whiskers. She had indeed told herself that a newspaper office would look, perhaps, less "practical." It would look like a bank. There would be a line of green shaded lamps under which young gentlemen wrote short stories. But this.

She walked to and fro in the horrible room. Perhaps some of her anger was due less to an outraged taste, than to being kept waiting when she was tired. Illness goes over a man like a wave. It goes through a woman like corrosive. The stare of the office boy had been like a touch on the burnt ends of nerves. She was bitter at the heart. She asked herself in a bitter instant if the slobber-mouthed boy who stared were the author of the story about the corpse. What a place, what a tone, what people. And Lionel! And she, herself, involved, implicated, tacitly made one with it. She sat again in the chair, waiting for Lionel. She sat erect, shrinking. She was always sensitive to her surroundings. Since her illness she had suffered daily from that sensitiveness.

She had dreaded contaminations, dreaded certain touches, the touch of dirt or death. The office, the fuming at the telephone, the boy with ears like flaps, the clack of the half-dozen typewriters, the smell of the new linoleum all laid the touch of dirt upon her. The story with its flavour of the sidewalk and the gutter was like death's finger on her mind. How much longer would Lionel keep her in that horrible place?

He came at last. He entered with a rush, leaving the door open. The clack of the typewriters grew suddenly louder. "I say, I'm sorry," he said. "It's dull for you. Where did I put it?" He rummaged quickly among the papers on his desk. "Things get lost so," he explained, peevishly. "Never mind, Andrews," he shouted, "I've got it here. Sha'n't be a minute, Rhoda," he added, as he hurried out. In his hurry he slammed the door behind him, sending a shock along every nerve in her body. She started, drawing in frightened breath through her teeth. William, the office boy, entered with another batch of letters. This time she looked through him with eyes which checked his curiosity. His abashed face reddened. He left the letters on the desk.

Rhoda waited for long minutes.

"I must go," she said at last, "I can't stay here." As she got up to go, Miss Coleman entered, carrying a type-written folio-sheet. The women looked at each other for the hard, bright perceptive second. They took each other in, body and soul, in one glance. The air round each woman quickened on the instant with instinctive antipathy. They belonged to the opposing camps of woman. Rhoda divined the essential Miss Coleman from the narrow lace edging at the throat of the mouse-coloured blouse. Instantly she assumed the queenly indifferent. She herself was delicately *bien mise*. She knew enough of her sex to know how that

would rankle, even in the bosom of one of the other camp. Miss Coleman placed the paper upon Lionel's desk. She searched for something in one of the pigeon-holes of the desk. Though she seemed unconscious of Rhoda's presence, a little quick blood in her neck, as she stooped, and a second's too long hunt for the missing thing betrayed her. The delicately dressed, gloved, hatted, perfumed lady made her feel out of it, conscious of every dulness, indignantly conscious.

She found what she wanted. She started for the door carrying three little books. She wore an indifferent face. Behind it was the certainty that soul for soul she was the finer woman. Rhoda ignored her presence. Her thought was "that person knows Lionel's affairs better than I." She did not grudge the knowledge. What hurt was the vulgarity of the affairs. The lowness of the conspiracy hurt, not the conspirators. She looked at the papers on the desk. The sheet which Miss Coleman had brought was the draft of an agreement by which Lionel was to pledge his "heirs, administrators and assigns." She picked up a letter. It was from one T. Neegate, who seemed to be the head of a distributing agency. She read it through. She had never seen such a letter. It was the letter of a vulgar mind furiously angry. Lionel's note upon it, "No answer, File" shocked her. Surely he would horsewhip the writer. Lionel found her moving up and down the room with the air of exasperated patience, with which tigers pace their cages. He came in with, "Now, I say, I'm sorry, Rhoda. Here you've been all this time. I got kept." He looked at himself in the little desk-mirror, shovelled aside the newly-come letters and shut the desk with a snap. "We'll get a taxi," he said. She drew herself rigid. She looked at him without speaking. William came to the door. "Mr. Neegate to see you, sir," he said.

"Mr. Neegate?" said Lionel. "Tell him I'm engaged. No. Tell him I won't see him."

"'E says it's very important, sir. 'E won't keep you a minute."

"I'm not going to see him," said Lionel. "Go and call a taxi." William left the room. Lionel took his hat from the peg. He turned to his wife.

"Poor old Rhoda," he said. "I owe you a treat for this. We'll get away for the week-end somewhere. To the New Forest or Chideock or somewhere." There came from the outer office a sound of violent footsteps. The door opened. A tall gross-faced, low-looking man appeared. He had the stub of a cigar between his teeth.

"What's this," he said, "about not seeing me? Eh?"

"Outside," said Lionel quickly. Without direct contact he had the man out of the room in two seconds. Rhoda was left alone. She heard the man storming in the outer office. Were they going to fight. After a minute of abuse, Lionel spoke a few words, very gently. She could not hear what they were. She tried hard to hear. They had a strange effect on the visitor. They took all the poison out of him. His next words were—

"Wot'jer mean? . . . Oh!" . . . There was a long pause. The man surrendered. He apologised in a broken voice. "I beg your pardon, sir." Lionel's answer was—

"I don't allow smoking here. Take that cigar out of your mouth. Don't come here again."

After a minute or two, Lionel came back to Rhoda. He was muttering about swine.

"I'm sorry you saw that, dear," he said. "You weren't frightened? He's a hard-headed, practical business man." He walked to his desk, took out the letter from T. Neegate, and locked it up in the safe,

"Taxi's at the door, Mr. 'Eseltine," said William.

"Might I speak to you a minute?" said Miss Coleman.

Rhoda sailed past Miss Coleman.

"You can't now, Lionel," she said, crossly. "Your work must wait. Your wife has waited long enough." It was one of the thrusts that fester.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN she was well enough to travel, she went into the country to stay with Dora, in the house near Ponton Hill, where so much had happened. She went alone, for Lionel was much too busy to leave town. He was "getting things ready." She arrived at Pudsey weak, white, and ill, much at war with herself. She settled down to a life like she had led of old, except that the zest for it was gone. Dora was kind. The bright days of late autumn brought back the colour to her cheeks. She gathered strength. Dora's tenderness taught her that Lionel was very unperceptive. Only, she wanted more than Dora. She wanted the love which had made Pudsey magical six months before. Yet, as she told herself, she did not want Lionel. The thought of being touched by him made her shrink.

Many memories made her shrinking more hysterical. The nights in the steamer, the lonely days in the flat, the countless moments that had revealed a want of sympathy in him. That was her great want. She wanted sympathy. Dora, of course, was full of sympathy, but a veil had been drawn between Dora and herself. Dora's sympathy could no longer touch the deep places in her. She had known a greater tenderness than Dora's.

She might have been fanned to a glow by a touch of tenderness in Lionel's letters to her. There was no tenderness; not more, at any rate, than saved the letters from the hum-drum. They were the letters of a very busy, very much worried, tired man. She had been used to tenderer letters from him, in the old days, when she was well, before this "work" became so exacting.

The thought that that work was the cause of his want of tenderness was another mark against him. Perhaps he thought that a wife needed no tenderness, that she was "safe," legally his. She sat by a fire, white and bitter, hour after hour, condemning him lest she should condemn herself. He was to come to Pudsey for the week-end. She did not want him. How could she escape him? What lie could she tell? This freedom was precious to her. She would not see him. How could she see him in the house where their love had been? No one but a man would be so tactless as to suggest it. He was so tactless, so careless of her point of view. He would remind her of that love-time as though it were still going on. Why, it was burning in her brain as nothing but the memory of a madness can. He would expect her to kiss him. She drew in her breath, clenching her teeth upon her lip. What madness had worked in her in April? She had given him this right, thinking that she could trust him. It had all seemed so beautiful. Surely no one but a brute beast! "Oh, but men are like that. Men are like that," she said in her shudder. All the torment of terror that had shaken her in the nights on the steamer returned now. It was worse, now, than then. Then she had still her trust in him. She had known that he cared for her, for her intimate essential self, the little inside soul that made the jelly of her eyes alive. Now. . . . Fear that she was not safe from him made her cower. She had watched him. She had weighed him. He had been tested. All through her illness he had been under the microscope of a narrow nature. He did not love her as she wanted to be loved, as a woman ought to be loved. How could she love him? Little deadnesses in him, little failures in responsion and understanding, grew intense now. They hurt. They swelled the distaste to an antipathy. She had loved

that thing. Now she saw him. That thing had held her in his arms, kissing her, here, in this very house. He was her husband, with rights over her. Once, as she lay on that sofa, he had bent down and kissed her throat. The memory of that kiss forced her to another seat. How could she wipe away from her all the stains of those memories. They made her feel unclean. All the room was foul with memories of him. The memory that he had sat there was like his presence there. Feeling contaminated, she drew up a creepy-stool. "Dora doesn't understand," she thought, bitterly. "She thinks it's only my illness. It's a revolt of me."

But he was to be with her that evening. Freedom is always a dangerous gift. Freedom makes men contemptuous of the ruler, critical of the law-giver. It gives him ideas of his sanctity not borne out by the facts. While she had been with him, his presence had caused a kind of tolerance. Now that she was away from him she saw him in the round. How could she greet him? How could she endure to be touched and held and kissed? How was she to stand up and play the wife? In a few days she would have to go back to him. The wheel of life in common would go round again, an Ixion's wheel spinning to death with two martyrs. "I must have these few days unpolluted," she muttered. "Oh, let him miss the train or let him be too busy. Don't let him come here to spoil these few days."

The hours passed. Dora came in for tea. Rhoda's memory stung her with impressions of past hours there. He had so often sat there with her. The Indian brass tea-tray had reflected their faces on that night of wonder in April. They had taken their coffee cups from it, sitting side by side. Dora was as red in the face as a ploughman's lass. She had been playing

rounders at the Rectory. It seemed insensitive of her to look so well when her friend was so miserable.

"Lionel hasn't come, I suppose?"

"No. Not yet."

"You think he'll come?"

"He may. I've not heard. He would be very nice, of course. Only, I don't know. Men in the house are so trying."

"They're rather good at rounders," said Dora. "I suppose they are best out of doors. Doing something. I remember Colin Maunsel saying that the secret of the Navy is that the men are always doing something. They're very clumsy, of course. They want a good big place, like a field or a ship or something. Still. There it is, if you can only get them to do it. What does Lionel do?"

"Oh, his newspaper work. And in his spare time he routs out boys from the slums. I don't pretend to be interested in the slums. London slums disgust me. Don't they you?"

"I don't like modern things. And English institutions bore me, I confess. There's a certain amount of romance in slums, I suppose, if one's a midwife or a thug or something. But then one never is. I suppose that's the drawback really. I suppose one never really sees the romance of a thing till one has lived in it and got out of it. What does Lionel find in the slums?"

"Oh, I don't know. 'Character' is what he's always talking about."

"I suppose there are some queer characters in the slums. I knew an old woman in Hoxton once who used to sing 'Holy, Holy, Holy' in the street till she'd got enough to get drunk on, and then she sang 'Chase me, Charlie,' till she was run in." Footsteps sounded outside on the path from the gate to the door. Rhoda's

face changed under a little momentary access of disgust. There was a knock at the door. "Here he is," she muttered.

"It's not Lionel," said Dora. "It's a telegram." The telegram was from Lionel to Rhoda. It said that he had been detained at the last minute.

"Does that mean that he's not coming to-night?"

"It's very unprecise."

"A nuisance," Dora said. "Well, shall I order the fly? What do you think?"

"No. Why should you? He can walk up."

"Yes, but men swear so if they have to walk up late at night. And it makes them so red in the face when they come in."

"The walk would do him good. Don't order the fly."

After tea, Rhoda condemned Lionel for failing to come. He could not care for her. He cared for his work more than for her. With a vindictiveness common among the unhappy she surrendered herself to bitterness against him. Her thoughts ran on one track. "If he had any thought of me he'd come to see me. But he hasn't and he doesn't. And if he won't take the trouble to keep my love, now that we are married, he will be to blame. He can't expect me to be the same to him, and I won't be."

She flung herself on the bed in her room in a mood too bitter for tears. Bad temper is seldom relieved by tears. Man, realising this, invented swearing; woman cannot swear. Dora's mention of Colin Maunsel made her think of another time in her life. She thought of a dance at a country house fourteen months before. There was a bower among laurel bushes. Those sitting there heard the music of the waltzes. Japanese lanterns glowed in the twilight like luminous fruit. Moths fluttered about them, or settled on the laurel leaves to stare, moving blurred antennæ. Very dimly in the

dusk the dancers passed about the garden, smelling the scent of drowsy flowers, and wondering at the stars. She had sat there with Colin Maunsel, hearing sweet things. "Are all marriages like mine?" she murmured, shutting her eyes. "Surely some men understand. Oh, I must be unlucky. If men can't love without that, women would kill themselves." She saw that garden of the past, dim under the moonrise, magical with the fall of the waltz. She heard again the words spoken to her in the bower. Colin Maunsel wasn't like other men. She had heard an older woman praise him as a man who could be a friend to women. If she had married such a man. If she had hearkened that night, helped him when his voice failed, given the least sign.

The brains of emotional people are full of images. So is water. Their brains are tida^l, with but a few hours interval between the flow and the ebb. Like water, their brains reflect images without reflecting upon them. It is the curse of the emotional brain that it cannot distinguish between an impression and a truth.

Rhoda sat with Dora that evening after dinner. The last post came. A boy brought it with the groceries. An advertisement for Rhoda, two letters for Dora, addressed in familiar writing.

"What does Milly say?" Rhoda asked.

"They've let their house. That'll be nice for them. They'll be able to get away." Dora opened the other letter, conscious that the sight of it had brought the blood into Rhoda's cheeks. "From Colin Maunsel," she said.

"What does he say?"

"He's settled down on that estate he was left, Pewcester, in Wiltshire. A pity he left the Navy. He must be as rich as a Jew. Well, I wish I had more of his complaint." She skimmed through the letter. "He wants to motor over. I'll just tell him he can't."

Rhoda was crimson. "I wouldn't mind meeting him," she said.

"We'll have him if you like."

"I don't particularly want to meet him. But if he wants to come, it seems a pity not to. You think he was in love with me. He wasn't. He danced with me, and we met a good deal. Perhaps there was a time when he might. But he didn't, and it's all over now. Besides, I never cared for him in that way. He was too susceptible. And then, fancy being touched by that hand."

"He's only lost a joint of one finger."

"I know. But it's the idea."

"He lost it in saving a man's life."

"How funny you are to-night, Dora, dear. Of course, ask him. I hope he'll have grown a moustache. His mouth spoils him."

The subject was dropped; Dora wrote the invitation. Rhoda shrank into herself. She stared into the fire, stroking her knee, thinking of the susceptible sailor. Dora wrote other letters. Sometimes she paused in her writing to ask a question or to look at her friend. When she had finished writing, she went to Rhoda and put her hand upon her shoulder.

"What is it, Roddy? Tired?"

"I'm just thinking, dear."

"Thinking of Colin Maunsel?"

"No. I was thinking of Lionel. He ought to have come to-night."

"Perhaps he'll come to-morrow."

"Don't touch me, please. I'm sorry. But my nerves are all wrong. I wish he'd come to-night."

"Lonely, Roddy?"

"There must be something wrong with me. I'm all on edge to-night. Do you think men ever understand women?"

"No. Not as we understand. Men learn us by heart sometimes."

"Ah. That's not the same thing."

"What is troubling you to-night?"

"It is so humiliating to realise."

"Oh, of course we're only animals. But we're decadents. It oughtn't to trouble us."

"It seems to me to be the one thing that ought to trouble us."

"Head bad, Roddy?"

"No. One would think that love might . . . I wish you wouldn't call me Roddy."

"Dear sweet, won't you tell me?"

"It's all so horribly unfair. Oh, if I could take this body and fling it into the nearest pond. Do you not get that loathing?"

"I think I see what you mean. No. It all seems too comic." She stroked her cheek meditatively. "After all, dear, being understood. . . . There's an implication of contempt. If men understood, we'd be popped into harems. We and our little ways."

"Then . . . Oh, I can't bear you sometimes, Dora. Where else do they pop us, as it is?"

"You know, dear, I don't hold any special brief for women. People in this world get what they're determined to have. We women have been determined to be rather rabbits. Men despise us, really, and all the more because we sometimes hypnotise them."

"Yes. They do despise us. They despise us down to the bone. You don't know how they despise us. They make us feel that we are beasts in a stable."

"Oh, only beasts do that. And even so, women often are beasts. Men don't fall in love with women, or try to kiss them and the rest of it, without provocation. Men are poor gunpowdery things. It must be a horrible nuisance to them. If women will play

with fire near them, what more can the women expect?"

"That isn't my quarrel with men. My quarrel is that one point of view is at least as valuable as another."

"So it is, dear. But it is not always so workable."

"Why must it be always the man's point of view that triumphs?"

"In the end it doesn't. The human being's point of view triumphs."

"Well. I have my own ideal of the human being, and of his relationships." Dora's face expressed sympathy; she waited to hear more, thinking that any mark of sympathy, a touch or kiss, would only make the nerves more fretful.

"I know, dear," she said. She was puzzled. In what strange fields of the mind was her friend straying? Three months before they had shared life like fellow-feasters, now between them there was this veil of an experience not shared.

"If I am worth anything at all as a human being," Rhoda said, "I am not going to accept valuation as an animal."

"Dear. Is he . . . ?"

"Oh, don't," Rhoda said, with a little shudder. She stood, leaning on the mantelpiece, staring down into the embers. "After all, it's their nature." She was silent; her neck and face flamed. She threw back her head with a gesture of ending it. "One lives in a fool's paradise," she said. "And there's this horror all round us. Oh! Oh! How beastly life is." She walked to the little side-table where the bedroom candles stood.

"What day did you ask Colin Maunsel for?" she asked.

"Wednesday next week, to lunch. I thought, if he would motor us over to the Leintwardine's it would save my ordering the fly."

"I don't know that I want to see Colin. I'm going to bed."

"Shall I come in to read to you?"

"No. Not to-night. I want to be alone. I want to think things out."

"Then good-night, dear. I wish I could help. May I kiss?"

Rhoda leaned a callous cheek and took her candle. She walked slowly, holding her dress to her, as though dreading a touch, any touch. At the head of the stairs she turned to look down upon her friend. Her face was a white mask.

"Rhoda."

"Yes."

"If Lionel should come to-morrow . . ."

"Sufficient unto the day. Good-night." Her door shut behind her. Dora heard the click of the lock. Stealing out into the garden, long afterwards, to see the stars, Dora saw the light still burning in the bedroom. It burned there till it burned itself out. Rhoda, lying in bed, with her knees drawn up, stared straight in front of her, shrinking from the mental image which obtruded itself time and time again. Dread of contamination made her icy cold. She shivered and shuddered. Her thought, not yet defined into words, was "Lionel may be here to-morrow night. And men are so horribly strong."

Colin Maunsel drove over from Pewcester on the Wednesday. Rhoda dressed with unusual care for him. Remembering a remark of his, that the only well-dressed women in Europe and America are the Spanish women who still wear the black mantilla, she dressed in a black silk. Black makes every woman look well dressed and every fashion beautiful. It took from Rhoda every appearance of being newly-married. Swimming in to the room to greet Colin Maunsel, she looked liker a

young widow than a bride. She was still a little pale from her illness. Her paleness, emphasised by the black, made her face "interesting." She looked unhappy. There is no son of Adam on earth who will not endeavour to comfort a woman who looks unhappy, if she be beautiful enough to give the endeavour point. The moment was a dangerous one for Rhoda and for the captain. Man or woman returns to the first love in the day of dissatisfaction with the second. Though neither of them knew this, he divined that she saw him now with a surer standard of comparison, and with a greater feeling of safety. He could speak now, she could listen. If life were not all roses, there was the subtle bond of an old affection between them, she could confide. Tea fillips the wit, twilight softens beauty, proximity disposes the manly soul to sentiment. To tea, twilight, and proximity were added a *vie manqué* and a beautiful woman in rebellion. The sentimental chess-board was set. The players only waited for that lonely half hour in the dusk, when the tale, however silly, melts, to begin their game. Sentiment is a popular game in sedentary societies too stupid to produce satirists. Everybody plays it or has played it. Though it invariably ends in stalemate, it is sufficiently wasteful of human emotion to be tragical. In its effects it is, perhaps, the most tragical thing in modern life. It all comes from living in cities. Women over-dress, and the men over-eat, because there is nothing else to do. When they meet together, nature's designs concerning them are ignored, while the one hints and the other whispers. The sweet silly souls have the knack of bringing death to every real soul near them.

Colin was bright and sympathetic. Rhoda sparkled to him recklessly, fell silent, and was again reckless.

Dora was troubled. She saw that the meeting might be dangerous. She regretted that she had asked the

old love. "Colin Maunsel is all very well," she thought, "but men are men." She gave no chance for the beginning of the game. She talked to Colin about the Heseltines' flat, about the Heseltines' marriage, about their work together. She suggested a perfect marriage. "Women are liars," she thought. "But then, it doesn't count, to a man."

They were sitting over the fire, talking, when the maid, coming in, asked her to step outside for a moment as some one wished to speak to her. On going out, she found that the village dressmaker had called to see her about a walking skirt. Dora was puzzled.

"You were to come to-morrow evening, not to-night," she said. "Didn't Mrs. Heseltine tell you? I shan't have the patterns till to-morrow."

"I'm sorry, miss," the woman said, "but the lady said to come to-night."

She dismissed the woman, saying that the lady had made a mistake. She stood still for an instant, in the passage, knitting her brows. Rhoda had taken the message that morning. How had she made the mistake? She had an uneasy feeling that Rhoda had wilfully bungled the message, so that the woman might call while Colin was with them. It looked as though Rhoda had planned to get her out of the room so that in her friend's absence she might be for a few moments alone with Colin. Instinct told her that if Colin had anything to say to Rhoda an instant's chance would be a stronger incentive to speech than an hour's opportunity. When she re-entered the room she was full of suspicion.

She entered upon one of these intolerable situations which explain themselves to a divining soul without evidence from the senses. Rhoda was sitting on the sofa, staring into the fire, with blood in her cheeks. Maunsel with his back to her was staring at a picture on the wall. They were silent, but the air was tense.

There was a memory in the air, still eloquent to the spirit, of a ringing note that had been struck there. Dora meant to punish them to the full. She went silently to her bureau, and searched in a pigeon hole for a paper. Both figures writhed a little under the silence. She stopped her searching to watch Maunsel's, back. There was a grim pleasure in seeing his neck redden.

"This is rather a jolly print," said Maunsel in a strange voice. It is unfortunate, sometimes, that men have little practice in lying after they leave school. There was a pause.

"Yes," said Rhoda, swallowing.

"Yes," said Dora. "Lionel used to admire it."

Maunsel's motor car was announced a minute later. Dora wished him good-bye. Her eyes stayed for a moment on the tracks of his tyres in the dust. Her thought was that Rhoda would hear from him by the morning post. Her second thought was that Rhoda should not walk alone till Lionel came to Pudsey to take her back to London.

"How beautiful the Pewcester road is, now the oaks are turning," Rhoda said, jangling this second thought. "Do you know Fair Tree? Isn't it a wonderful view from there?"

A woman scatters such hints hardly daring to hope that the man may have the wit to perceive.

"I'll look out for Fair Tree," Maunsel said, glancing down at his map. Dora wished that Lionel were there. She was glad that she had no engagements till Friday afternoon, when she had promised to go to the Fusters. She thought that she might cancel that engagement. She stood at the gate with Rhoda till the car had turned the corner. Rhoda's face was a mask again. They walked back, arm-in-arm, to the sitting-room. They sat down, woman-fashion, to criticise their guest. Dora pricked her sharply to see if she could make her wince.

"Colin wants a wife," she said. "Why doesn't he marry Polly Hamlin? A rich bachelor in a little cathedral town! It isn't fair on the mothers. He looks rather *gâté* already. Who could we marry him to?"

"Nelly Swinburne would have suited him, if she had lived," said Rhoda, sadly, looking into the fire. "What beautiful hair Nelly had. All the beautiful people seem to die or get married."

"He hasn't made you sad, Rhoda?"

"Who? Colin? No. But I'm over-tired. It all seems so hopeless."

"Lionel will be here on Saturday." Rhoda shivered slightly, and stretched a hand to the blaze.

"It seems to me," she said, "that a little real life withers in us whenever we add a new refinement."

"Curious," Dora said. "I was thinking just the same. I was thinking how awfully dead Colin's face looks now that he's grown that horrible moustache."

Thursday passed without incident. Rhoda expressed no wish to go out upon the Pewcester Road. Dora could not be certain that any letter had come from Colin. She surmised it. She suspected that Rhoda had replied to it; but Rhoda's fair face was smooth, her manner natural, their intimacy apparently perfect. Dora's thoughts were given to the framing of an excuse for staying at home on Friday instead of going to the Fusters. She feared to give that opportunity. Marriage, as she could see, has sandy tracts; sentiment promises pleasant waters. She realised the romantic possibilities of a motor car. A line from a Shakespeare play rang in her head: "Come o'er the bourne, Bessy, to me." The prospect of upsetting Mr. Colin's plans was pleasant to her.

On Friday, Rhoda's manner towards her was more warmly affectionate than it had been since the marriage. She was very tender and sweet, like a little sister asking

to be forgiven. Dora had wanted that; it was very dear to her. She felt that the veil had at last been removed from between them. She felt again the spiritual nearness which had made the old companionship so delightful. Caressing her, Rhoda asked if she, too, might come to the Fusters that afternoon.

"How dear of you," Dora said. "That will be lovely." With a sudden impulse Rhoda leaned her cheek; the friends kissed.

Driving in the pony-cart to the Fusters, Dora made a big round, so as to cross the Pewcester road at Fair Tree. They saw the usual miracle of an English October. The blue of the sky was chill above the apple-orchards. The apples were full of the sweetness and colour of the summer. They were red and sweet among the apple-leaves; they were golden in the light against branches roughened by lichens. Down below in the valley the farms were peaceful. Looking at them, Rhoda remembered the time when she had thought that the oast-houses were witches in white, peaked caps.

"It is very beautiful," she said.

"Pity we aren't more a part of it," Dora answered. "We seem such beastly excrescences." Her eye roved the road for the tracks of a motor car. Tracks were there; but she could not say in which direction the car that made them had been moving.

"We'll go by the lane, if you don't mind," she said. "If Noggin meets a motor car he gets over the hedge. Your nerves aren't equal to that."

"You're rather a dear person," said Rhoda. "You take such care of me."

When they got back to the cottage they found the cards of Colin Maunsel and of his sister, Mrs. Harcourt. On one of the cards was a note in pencil. "Such a lovely day. Called to take you for a ride." Rhoda

put down the card. Her face was impassive. She coloured a little under Dora's gaze.

"Give me the card," she said. Taking it, she read it through again and dropped it thoughtfully into the fire. She watched it burn. Dora, coming close to her, buried her face in some chrysanthemums, the spoils of the visit to the Fusters. She peered at Rhoda through the long, flopping brown and white petals.

"You would look rather sweet in black, with white chrysanthemums," she said.

"I'm horrid. I could never look sweet. I'm degraded," Rhoda answered.

"You're a very dear person, and I love you and love you," said Dora, "and you're going to rest before dinner, while I read to you." The resulting kiss seemed to her to be intended for the writer of the note upon the card.

Lionel did not come till one o'clock on Sunday morning. He came by the last train to Drowcester, and drove from there in a motor car. Rhoda, lying awake, heard him enter the house, and creep upstairs to his little room near the bath-room. He had come. The strain was to begin again. She sat up, wondering what the morrow might hold. Her thought was, "So he is here. I shall have to meet him." He seemed stranger to her than Colin Maunsel. Colin was nearer to her in her present mood; but Colin made her a little afraid. She had run away from Colin. Colin's last letter lay on her heart; yet she was afraid. Fear of she knew not what made her thought almost tender of Lionel. Falling asleep, she slept brokenly till it was time to rise. When the maid called her, she sat up to drink her tea, wondering why the morning should bring such distaste for life. She looked at herself in the glass, with haggard eyes.

"I do look a wreck," she muttered. "Shall I stay in bed and see him here? If I do that, there's no getting

away from him. I'll go down." She dressed slowly, with many pauses before the mirror. "I'll do my hair *à la Grecque*," she muttered, with her lips full of hair pins. "He used to like that. Or no. I don't want to be liked. I want to be the star still. I won't be dragged to earth." She remembered a little French lady whom she had met at a theatre. A little, plain French lady, quite plain, with not even one good feature, but with a look of intelligence and a way of doing the hair *à la Bérénice* that made her almost lovely. Remembering her, Rhoda patted and brushed her hair *à la Bérénice*. It did not suit her very well. It made her face too long. "She was a clever little thing," Rhoda said to herself, thinking of the lady. Thinking this, she stayed for a long time motionless before the mirror. There was something in that French woman, a spark, or salt. She was always a zest to the mind, ever delightful. "I wish I were like that," she said. "Lionel's so horribly clever, I can't follow him. I'm not interested in science and social reform. I can't stand his clever friends. They're very clever, I suppose, but they talk like Radicals. They aren't like the men I've been accustomed to. And the women! If I were clever I might be a helpmeet to him. But Providence seems to have taken care of that. And he doesn't want it. He never consults me about anything. Besides, he ought to study my point of view. I want to be petted and made much of. We ought to have a car, and go about, and see nice people." In spite of this conclusion she was sad when she left her mirror. "I'm not clever enough," she said. She had a bitter wish to defend her upbringing. "All the same, I am worth considering. Other men have liked to talk to me. I've been brought up to a certain kind of life. It may not be very intellectual; but it is the only life worth having. The life of rich, leisured men and women, with stakes in the

country and an interest in the poor. It isn't our business to be intellectual. Intellect is one of the things done for our amusement. And all this talk of the poor is only jealousy, because they haven't got our wealth. If all the money in England were equally divided at noon it would have to be re-divided at five minutes past. How could any of Lionel's friends pretend to know about governing? They had not an estate between them. They were trying to educate the poor above their station, and the consequence of that would be revolution." She remembered telling Lionel the story of one of her friends, who had been trying to get a housemaid. "A very nice girl came, and everything seemed satisfactory. She was the daughter of one of the cowmen in a farm in the next village. She was engaged, and as she was going out of the room she asked if she might practise on the piano in the school-room sometimes, as 'she wouldn't like to give up her music.'" Lionel had not laughed at the story. He had fixed her with his doctor's eye, and asked where the girl lived. He wanted her to engage the girl as housemaid.

She went downstairs leisurely, on tip-toe, listening for Dora's voice. She heard no sound of Dora. Lionel at breakfast within was beheading an egg. She wanted the moral support of Dora. Not finding her in the sitting-room, she peeped into the kitchen, where the maid told her that Miss Dora had gone to early service with intent to breakfast afterwards at the Rectory. Dora's tact was generally put on with a trowel; so here. As there was no chance of support, Rhoda had to venture alone. She pushed into the little dining-room to greet her husband.

CHAPTER V

SHE could not move from the door towards him. He felt her disinclination and respected it. He had thought of her as a pathological condition and had come to an opinion about her. He took her hands in his.

"Well, dear wife. And how are you? You're looking much better. Come and have your tea." He led her to a place near the fire; the table was between them.

"I don't feel much better," she said. "But don't let's talk of body."

"Dora's gone to early service," he said.

"I don't want to talk of the soul, either. How are you? How is your work? When will you publish?"

"I shall publish in ten days from now."

"And your new scheme—the Brigade of News-boys—is that all prepared?"

"That is prepared."

"How many boys have you?"

"Over four hundred."

"Really? Half a battalion. In uniform?"

"White, with green facings. Yes. They are rather a problem to drill."

"And they will sell your papers for you when they are printed?"

"Yes."

"How exciting. Do you think it will succeed?"

"God knows," he answered, a little tartly. He had put so much of himself into the work that a word of belief in him, however insincere, would have cheered his heart. She resented his tone; she looked at him without speaking.

"You'll have to have a new frock for the opening," he said. "Or shall it be a jewel?"

"Oh, must I?" she asked. "I'm not strong enough to go to any ceremony. I can't give a reception. Surely, there's no need for any reception? Or must you have one? Couldn't you do it?"

"Well. I'll do it," he said. He was rather blank about it.

After breakfast they sat by the fire in the sitting-room. She shrugged her shoulders in a shudder lest he should touch her. Her good will towards him was gone. She sat coldly critical, half contemptuous. She was a little angry at the tartness of his "God knows," and at his wish that she should receive guests for him. "I suppose his typist and his writers," she muttered, scanning his face for further faults. He looked very much worn. When his face was white from fatigue one noticed the redness of his eyes. She noticed it now, with shrinking. She did not like his neck. He wore a low collar which exposed it a good deal. She resented the low collar. She resented his cuffless, easy flannel shirt. "*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*" was one of her maxims. None of the men of her set wore such things. She was wilfully silent; he, too, was silent; she tapped with her foot.

"Rhoda," he said, "what do you think about coming to town with me to-night?"

"What have you decided?"

"I want you to decide. London's a nervous place. Do you feel that you are strong enough?"

"I am quite well, now."

"You will come, then?"

"Had you rather I did not?"

"No, I would like you with me. I want to have you by me, to look after. I'm lonely, and I miss you."

"I'm afraid of interfering with your work," she said.

"The work will be very little after the beginning. I can leave Carnlow in charge. We can go away. We've not had our honeymoon yet."

"No," she said, in a strange voice. "Not yet."

"Where shall we go, Rhoda? Italy or Spain?"

"I don't much care where we go. What are you going to do this morning? It's a pity to waste this sun. Won't you go for a walk? You look rather worn. A walk would do you good."

"Will you come?"

"I never walk in the morning."

He crossed over to her. He noticed that she shrank from him, expecting him to sit beside her. He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Well?" she said.

"Rhoda," he answered. "You don't want to come away with me."

"Have I said so?"

"Women never say what they want. They bring it about."

"That may be true. But you have no cause to doubt me."

"My dear girl, it isn't a question of doubt. It's a case of . . . Dear, we sat in this room only a few weeks ago, like lovers. What has come to you? Tell me what you are feeling?"

"I've been ill, as you know. My nerves aren't quite under control. I can't bring myself to face. I'm . . . I find it difficult, since my illness, to face things which I never really realised before it. You mustn't blame me altogether. I think women don't play quite fair with girls; perhaps men don't."

He thought this over, searching her face. "No," he said. "I ought to have talked this out with you. I wish I had. You have been brooding."

She smiled the thin smile of contempt. "Men are wonderful," she said. "They see things so."

He thought for a full minute; the clock ticked; Rhoda drew a breath of boredom.

"Do I look like a wild beast, Rhoda?"

"Men have a wild beast whether they look it or not."

"That thought came from a professional temptress."

"It's true."

"Many women try to make it so. But seductive ladies are pretty rotten evidence. How long have you been going in fear and trembling?"

"Those are not the words to use. I can defend myself. It's the humiliation of having to do so."

"*Mariage blanc*." Rhoda leaned on the mantelpiece, looking down.

"There are pig-styes outside."

"Yes," he said. "But pigs haven't our incentive to life."

"Life!"

"Yes. Life. You've lived in a drawing-room all your days. The natural world must look a little queer."

"I'm complaining of its beastliness."

"So I gather. On what grounds?"

"My own sense of . . . Oh, Lionel . . . my own sanctity."

"I don't think you can complain that I've been un-mindful of that."

"You've never understood my point of view. You've said things."

"My dear girl. Sexual irreverence is beastly. But sexual sentimentality! Do you expect me to talk as though the mystery that makes life is indecent? Lord God, you women deserve all you get."

"Kindly remember, Lionel, that I am a lady."

"You went to an expensive school, where you learned to play cricket and the date of Queen Elizabeth's death.

Well. I suppose I shall understand these English some day."

"I'm not inclined to listen to rudeness, Lionel."

"No," he answered. "It's not rudeness. It's only wonder. Let us get this thing straight." He stared into the fire for a while, with little shrewd glances at Rhoda's face.

"I believe in man," he said at last. "I believe in man more than I believe in any thing he has invented. 'Before him goes the pestilence, and burning coals go forth at his feet . . . and the everlasting mountains are scattered, the perpetual hills do bow.' I've always thought that."

"Yes?" she said, idly.

"Thinking that, one gets afraid of letting in the enemy. If man is so much more than an animal, he must be it all through, or else you get a monster. That is my point. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"I've thought of this sex-business. Men and women have played the devil with it, as they always do with every charity in the world. I made up my mind that as far as I'm concerned it will stay as Nature meant it. Nature means it to be the perfectly normal expression of a temporary, strictly seasonal mood, lasting, perhaps, for two or three weeks in each autumn." He stopped. He looked gravely at her, waiting for her reply. "That is my attitude," he said.

"You think it is only that," she said, flushing. "It is more than that."

"Yes. It's more than that," he said. "I've always longed for children." She was silent, with a burning, drooped face. He watched her. His face was full of tenderness. She found it hard to breathe.

"Do you dread children, Rhoda?" She shook her head, shutting her eyes.

"Dread having them? We should go through it together." She shook her head again. It was hard for her to speak.

"That is something," she murmured, breathing deeply. "Something I'm not prepared for."

"I understand," he said, strangely gentle. "Life's not been kind to you. You lost your mother when you were a child. Children who are misunderstood always dread life later on. I did, till I was in India that time. Old Sir Patrick taught me. We stamped out Travancore ophthalmia. I was his dresser and he did the work. It was like Christ 'making the blind to see, Good Lord.' That is what man is. 'Before him goes the pestilence . . . and the everlasting mountains are scattered.' A little child would be very much to us, Rhoda." She shook her head to his pleading. "I can imagine," she said. "But, no. It is something against my nature. It isn't dread. It's horror."

"Looking beyond the horror, Rhoda. Do you see nothing? You know, perhaps, that without children marriage is hard. Gets very hard later in life. Childless old age. We ought not to cramp our lives. Childless marriages. I don't know. Even if there were war, and our home were being shelled and they were starving, children would make life less of a doggerly. But I see your point, too."

"If I were to consent," she muttered, speaking hoarsely, in a whisper, "the horror would be in me. The child would not have a chance. My thoughts would be killing it all the time."

He looked out of the window, while his mind brooded on the myriad lives stunted by the nerves of mothers.

"Well. We won't talk of it," he said, sighing. "Poor old Rhoda." He stared out of the window again. "Bit of a frost last night," he said. "There's rime on the

walk, out of the sun. Your Michaelmas daisies must have been a show."

"Yes. They were a show."

"I love October," he said. "'Oh, come, October, with a good blast.' I love the cobwebs and the frost. 'Misty, bright October.' One doesn't get enough out of the months in London. They have special significances which we fools of town-dwellers ignore. Town-dwellers might just as well be dead. They are dead. The trouble is, they aren't buried. The earth has a big rhythm. 'It shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.' Deliver me from modern philosophy as long as there's a Bible."

"I could never follow the Bible in what we've been discussing."

"That? You're partly right in that, Rhoda. It's a crazy business. Or we've made it crazy. I sometimes think that civilisation's a tumult of ingenious folly devised to cover the initial mistake. Here comes Dora, in a dress so silly that she can't keep warm without a fire or a coat."

He went for a lonely walk that afternoon. He walked to a lonely woodland, through which the brook ran. He sat upon a stump opposite a reach where the water slid past a tiny cliff of sandstone. Water-rats passed up and down unheeding. His mind followed the run of the brook. "I wish I had its purposelessness, its power, and its eternity," he said. "How very unfruitful it is, for a thing that causes all fruit." He thought of Rhoda, and of their talk together. "She doesn't understand what I'm trying to do," he muttered. "And if she did, she would oppose it." Loyalty kept him from making crueller charges; but under other images his mind attacked the conventional feminine mind. The

thought of children had been much with him during the last few days. Thought of a boy beside him, sailing boats down the brook, and plugging at them with a catapult, was sharp in him. "Well. It is not to be," he said, starting up. His own wishes prompted him to say that in the matter of Rhoda's reluctance it was not the woman speaking, but only her nerves. Walking on up-stream he rejected this. "It is the real woman," he said. "Every nerve in her body has been sharpened to defend the idea of the conventionally correct." The problem became more difficult, the more he thought of it. "Life is going to be hard," he said. In cases like these the view ahead is very black. Man can see that there is no way out but death. He cannot see that these troubles are resolved by an adjustment. Lionel, looking ahead, saw an endless succession of conversations with a doll about the superiority of waxwork. Rhoda could not look ahead. She looked into the present. Not liking what she saw, she hurried shivering, to her past, calling to the ghosts to save her.

CHAPTER VI

Snip Snap was almost ready for the press. Much may be done, even in London, in six months, by the application of energy. *Snip Snap* was no small task, no small achievement. Lionel, looking at his office staff, or drilling companies of his Brigade in what had once been a swimming bath, felt that something had been done. The paper might fail of success from one cause or another; it could hardly avoid popularity. The Brigade was a living fact, visibly creating character under his hand.

The Brigade at that time numbered four hundred and fifty youths. Since then, it has changed and increased. It now has its squad, if not its company, in every town in England. The bright green and white uniform is well known. Less well known is the excellent barrack-system by which the boys are fed, housed, and taught. It is the boast of its officers, that a Brigade boy can obtain as good an education as the son of a peer. Lionel had but the shadow of these things then.

Two days before the opening he sat in his office, thinking of his staff. By opening his door he could see them at their work, the strange, immortal souls, precious to God. He had a staff of more than a dozen human beings. Most of them were brands from the burning. All of them had been to some extent waste products, tossed about at the whim of a pitiless industrialism. He looked them over, wondering if any nation in the world had been so careless of the life within her, so blind to the holiness of this flame which burns for so short an hour. All the company were corn ears that had been

beaten in a bag "to knock the dust off." The miracle was that any corn remained in the ears; yet there it was, ready to spring green and ripen, cause "for the shouting for the summer fruits and joy of the plentiful field." They had all been wasted, yet in spite of all the waste, they were good still.

There was his serial writer. Lionel had found him writing a romance called "Rube the Ruthless" in one of the hutches of the Tombstone Press. He said that his name was Antony Seymour. He was a dim, nervous man, with clammy hands. Lionel was attracted by him. He could not persuade him to talk. There was always "a mystery" about him. He came out of the unknown, with a cringing manner. His nerves were all gone. He had a way of standing still, fumbling with a cap, looking at the floor, whenever anybody spoke to him. If one spoke to him sharply he trembled. He was about twenty-seven years old. He gave one the impression that he had "done something." There was no hint of what it may have been. It was hard to think of that shambling, fumbling figure committing a crime of passion, seeing red. It was hard to think of him in love. He came in, cringing and trembling, answering "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," with an eagerness which gave each affirmation the fervour of an oath. It was as though he said, "God, yes, sir," or "Yes, sir. I take my Bible oath of it," or "For God's sake, sir, believe me. It's true, s'elp me, sir. Gor blimey, sir, it's true." Lionel felt that at some time or other, Antony had spoken in that strain, unavailingly, from a prisoner's dock. Prison would account for the rest. Prison kills the fineness in a man so that the weakness in him may rot. Lionel, who was, in many ways, quite as Ruthless as Rube, felt for the man a pity which was more than half anger against society. He thought Antony was a gentle, silly creature without enough blood in him for

any respectable sin. "A superior clerk, I suppose, caught picking the pockets in the overcoats of the other clerks. Or something falsified. The wages cheque, perhaps, at the end of the week. Silly juggins. Blood to the head. No nerves to begin with. Fed, probably, on bread and cheap tea. Not enough jump to resist anything. Ought to have been given a rest cure and proper food. Instead of which they comb his nerves to a frazzle in a silent cell. Good God. It would turn a Rural Dean into an Apache." Lionel rather liked the creature; or no, he did not like the creature. He liked the feeling that the creature was happy with him. Lionel paid him thirty-five shillings a week to write serials. It was more than he had earned in the back room of the Tombstone Press, writing continuations to "Rube the Ruthless." He wrote better, at a steady wage. Lionel rented a little gas-heated room for him close to the main office. He wrote there. The quality of his work? Well, we are not sensitive to that kind of thing over here. Un-English, all that. *Æsthetic*.

Lionel knew nothing about Antony; never learned of his past, never got much further with him. Something big and very pitiless had gone over Antony, and pressed out all the blood. Like all who have been thoroughly broken, he had all the virtues of the slave. He was punctual. He worked without driving. He was neat. "You've been held in tight order," Lionel said to himself. "It's got right into you and hurt." He did not know where Antony lived. He followed once, to find out. He tracked him to the side-door of a big restaurant near Piccadilly Circus. Antony disappeared within the door. It was the same the next night, and the night after. Lionel was puzzled for a little while. Then he remembered the descriptions of high life in *Doomed and Damned, or the Mystery of Lady Grace*. Antony was a waiter.

It struck him as pitiful. What sort of life was that for a man? What human relationships made life less bitter to the creature? What kind of harrow had gone over him? Something hard and sharp. A man came cringing in at half past nine, to write all day in a little gas-warmed office. He took a joy in the fire. "Very nice and warm, sir, very ingenious, this little gas-fire." Antony had gone fireless some time in his life, that was plain. After a morning's writing, he lunched in a tea-shop, "a lunch-cake" and a cup of coffee, then wrote again till William brought him tea, then slunk away to be a waiter. And on Sundays? What did he do on Sundays? On Sundays Antony waited during the luncheon hours. "It was a change."

Then there was Miss Coleman. She came to see him after sending him the dummy for a suggested new weekly paper. Something in the dummy made him ask her to call. She was about twenty-two. She was a gentle-looking woman, robust, with rather beautiful eyes. Her hands were strong and capable. There was a dignity in her bearing which Lionel liked. She wasn't "a lady" perhaps; she was something better; she was a fine character. Lionel made a mental note that all the best women known to him had the same kind of eyes. Miss Coleman's eyes reminded him continually of Mrs. Drummond.

"Have you done ordinary typing?" he asked.

"Not very lately," she said. "I typed one or two things, out of hours."

"How lately?"

She hesitated. His eye fixed her. "Six months ago," she said.

"Look here." Lionel rose, pulled out a sheet of paper and handed it to her. "Take down what I'm going to say. Here's a pencil." He dictated a letter. She took it down in shorthand.

"There's a machine over there," he said. "Just write it for me. Are you used to a Smith?"

"Yes," she said, faintly, white to the lips. She walked unsteadily to the Smith. Lionel watched her. Something in her manner startled the doctor in him. She pressed back the catches, and lifted the big tin cover. She put it down with an unusual tender care as though she feared to make any noise. Lionel took a step towards her. She fingered the paper for an instant. Then she dabbed at the platen with a foolish hand. She took a deep breath or two, gave a little cry and fainted off.

"Good Lord," said Lionel. His brain ran over the possibilities in an instant of time. "Starvation," he thought. If she had had another kind of eye he would have suspected the beginning of an attempt at blackmail. There was a carafe on his desk. He splashed a little water on to her face from the carafe. She soon came to. Lionel noticed, and felt a beast for noticing, that the soles of her shoes were much worn at the toe and heel. He helped her into a chair, gave her water to sip, and felt very like a dentist waiting for a patient to rinse. "Blackmail," he said to himself. "She doesn't look like that. But if her nerves are all wrong. . . ." He remembered the countless hysterical charges brought against men. When she looked better (though still very white and confused) he spoke again.

"You walked here?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Are you better, now? Can you bear to listen? You needn't hurry. You can sit and rest."

"I am all right," she said, weakly.

"Well," he said. "*Snip Snap* may be a failure. The job may not be permanent. I'll take you on if you like, to start, at thirty shillings a week, as my secretary. I'll raise you, gradually, to two ten. If *Snip Snap's* a

success I shall float a weekly like this dummy of yours. I don't know whether you could edit it. Come here to-morrow at nine." She thanked him, but made no effort to go. She looked as weak as water. William brought in tea. Lionel told him to bring in another cup. He drank only China tea, which William, after many suppreptitious sips, had condemned as flavourless. Miss Coleman drank tea and ate a couple of biscuits. Lionel gave her a week's wages in advance and sent her home in a cab. Long afterwards he learnt her story. She had been out of work for six months. When she walked to the office that afternoon, she had eaten nothing for thirty-six hours.

William, the office boy, was another strange product of our civilisation. He was an honest-looking, ugly creature, with a big, loose mouth and the power of moving the skin of his scalp at will. He had been born in the cabin of a canal barge, about fifteen years before this story begins. A drunken uncle brought him up, by means of a foul tongue and a belt. When he was nearly nine years old the uncle died. William made a living for a time by dodging about among the streets. After a few weeks of this he was sent to a reformatory school for trying to "nick" a pair of boots from a boot shop, at the bidding of a bigger boy, who escaped. The school was in the charge of an old ex-sergeant of a line regiment. It is a moot point, which is the worse qualified to look after boys, an ex-Army or an ex-Navy man. Lionel gathered from William that this ex-sergeant was probably worse than a Navy-man.

"We didn't 'alf use to cop it, sir. 'E 'ad a belt 'e called Nero. But wot 'urt worse than any belt was a Kine. 'E used to 'ave the Kine when the Committee came rahnd. That wos like the gov'nors of the school. They'd used to ast us wos we 'appy. When we see the Kine we didn't dare say No. One time I said I wasn't

'appy. The sergeant 'ad been laying into me. 'E'd cop me some fair ones. So when I said that 'e told the Committee that I was a bleedn young liar. They were only a lot of old white 'aired geezers, like gentlemen. And of course they took 'is word. I didn't 'alf cop it before Turn in, wot's more. O that Kine was awful. When 'e'd been 'aving a pot or two, 'e used to come rahnd where we were in bed. 'E used to kine us through the clothes. I got aht of that school after I'd bin there three years. I 'ad the pleece after me. I got away in an ash-barge along the canal. I didn't 'alf stink when I got aht. I got aht of the ash pretty near starved. And the missus of the barge 'adn't seen me come aht, it give 'er a turn. 'Gor blimey,' she says, 'where the 'ell d'joo come from?' She 'elped me wiv some clothes. I went along the canal to I get to some plice. An old bloke ast me to come in to a sort of church plice where there was magic-lanterns. So 'e give me tea and kike, and there was a silly sort of geezer wot didn't ort to've been aht. 'E was checkin a sponge rahnd at the lemps. 'E got one lemp, fair, and it didn't 'alf explode. It was only a wooden sort of plice. So I thought, this'll be a bit of wot o if that lemp ketches onto that wood. So there was girls and that sitting round. So I off me coat and it only took about two minutes to 'ave it aht. They spread me 'ands with butter after. A silly sort of gime, buttering a bloke's 'ands. But it's a fair wot o fer burns. And the old bloke ast me wos I doin anythin. 'E was Mr. Carnlow, writes books. 'E kep me in a room to my 'ands was cured. Then he set me up to tahn to young Mr. Carnlow, wot keeps The Boys' Mission. I'm sergeant at The Boys' Mission. I don't need no Kine. You'd ought to come rahnd, Mr. 'Eseltime. We 'ave parades on Tuesdays. There ain't bad boxing, parade nights. There's young Alf Stone. 'E's a fair knock aht. You'd orter

seen 'im aht young Ginger. 'E cop the spike young Ginger. An' young Ginger's class. Young Ginger, he was in the semi-finals once at the 'Empstead. If you ever want ter back any one, Mr. 'Eseltine, you'd orter see young Stone. E's got a punch over the 'eart. I wouldn't like it to 'appen ter me."

"There it is," said Lionel, looking at them. "What waste. What waste." There was Julia Coleman, a noble woman, a wife for a king, allowed to starve, kept unused for half a year at the whim of the market. There was Antony Seymour, broken to pieces, made something less than human, at the whim of the law. There was William, a fine, manly lad, with a genius, as Lionel discovered, for decorative design, driven to hide in an ash-barge at the whim of the whole senseless system. What waste. What a system. It was everywhere, in every department of life. A conspiracy of the purblind to annul the fine.

He sighed. He had reasons to sigh. He had been at work for half a year; and during all those months he had been astonished by the corruptness of English commercial life. There were hands stretched out for a bribe at every corner. He sighed. He knew his Bible very well.

"'Thy people also shall be all righteous!'" he quoted. "'They shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting.' At least, if it may be," he muttered. "Lord grant it," as old John Dent would have said. No man would sow seed without that vision of the green tree glorious.

On the day before the day of the first publication of *Snip Snap*, Lionel mustered the brigade in Hyde Park. He had a force of four hundred infantry, fifty bicyclists, and a band of thirty instruments, mostly drums and fifes. Lionel put them through a little simple drill, in the presence of some hundreds of loafers. He then

marched them down Oxford Street singing to a new catchy quickstep, which was soon hummed all over the town. A copy of the words and music was given away the next day with each copy of the new paper.

The success of *Snip Snap* was amazing. Nothing had been said about it. Nobody had heard about it. Suddenly, on an unready London, came a new paper, a new song, a new force. "SNIP SNAP. You cannot get it at the bookstalls." Green and white banners printed with that legend waved from half the omnibuses in London. Similar banners waved from the office windows. The green and white uniforms of the Brigade drew crowds. There was a crowd about each boy. No first number ever sold so well. It sold like hot cakes. *Snip Snap*. Have you seen *Snip Snap*? It was the talk of the world. By dusk that evening, when, after countless interviews, Lionel found time to share some food with Miss Coleman in the office, he was assured of success. The press had been running all day long turning out more and yet more copies. The office was besieged. The crowd in the street waiting for copies was marshalled by the police, like a theatre queue. Up above the crowd, from the central window of the office, three big phonographs shouted in order a horrible kind of part-song:—

" *Snip Snap*
You cannot get it at the bookstalls
Snip Snap."

Mr. Lorenzo Ike, the well-know comedian, had been taken into Lionel's confidence some days before. He delighted four "halls" that evening with a new topical song—

" *Snip Snap*
Have you seen *Snip Snap*?
If you haven't, you're a pip, chap."

When once heard, the song stayed in the brain till death released the sufferer. *Snip Snap*. "Have you seen *Snip Snap*?" Up above the window from which the phonographs shouted, an illumination ran along the office wall, from letter to letter.

"*Snip Snap*," it ran. "You cannot get it at the bookstalls." Letter after letter flashed out, till the whole was lit. Then the letters blinked for an instant. The gold of the lighting flashed to green. After another instant, the green became red. There was a pause. People watched. The light died. The letters were blank for a moment. Then, with a wink, the S glowed gold again. Letter after letter flashed. A roar of laughter rose from the crowd when the message came to an end.

"You cawn't get it at the bookstalls."

"Thet's aw right, en't it?"

"*Snip Snap*."

At half-past eleven, when the streets were crowded by the emptying of the halls and theatres, the band of the *Snip Snap* Brigade marched from Hyde Park Corner to St. Paul's, playing the now familiar tune. A large crowd followed the band. In Piccadilly Circus, the revellers coming from the Caballero insisted that the band should play the song with which Mr. Lorenzo Ike had been delighting them. The words and the music of

"*Snip Snap*

Have you seen *Snip Snap*?

If you haven't, you're a pip, chap."

rose up in a roar. Cabmen jeered at the marchers. Men and women, standing on the tops of omnibuses wondered, cheered, or sobbed, as the enthusiasm flooded past to the tune. *Snip Snap*. The fifes went wailing round the corner. The purity of their tone searched the heart. Women cried. Men flinging away their

tickets, even twopenny and threepenny tickets, hurried from the omnibuses to join the march. There had been nothing like it since the days of the war. In the Hay-market the army doubled itself from the pits and galleries of the theatres. The band marched on. The drums thundered. The wail of the flutes cried aloud. In the Strand there were four thousand people marching. Outside the *Snip Snap* office the crowd became so dense that extra police were called out.

Lionel sent Miss Coleman home. Several interviewers were waiting to see him. The room was littered with letters and telegrams. Scores of people had written and telegraphed their congratulations. The clerks in the manager's office downstairs had worked overtime. William was weary of heading off and admitting. Lionel was very tired. The phonographs were changed suddenly. The biggest of them shouted "Three cheers for *Snip Snap*." The others joined in the cheering. The crowd cheered. The illumination stopped. A new fire lettering appeared. "Good-night" it spelt. "Buy *Snip Snap*. Good-night." The message shone for five minutes, then vanished. The crowd moved on, laughing. They had had their show. Lionel saw his last interviewer off the premises. The evening press had been favourable. People had been wonderfully kind. He was touched by an act of Miss Coleman's. She had come to the office wearing rosettes of the *Snip Snap* colours.

"Six o'clock to-morrow morning, William," he said, as he left the office.

"Very good, Mr. 'Eseltine. A bit of all right, ter dye, sir."

Lionel hailed a cab. He had tasted success. But he was a great deal too tired to care for it. He felt as though his spine had been removed. To-morrow would be empty. Yet to-morrow he would need his wits, all

his wits. To-morrow would be harder than to-day. To-morrow he would have to carry on the fight, rally up his friends, send on his cavalry, be the conquering general. Often, in his soldier days, he had longed for war. He had now tasted war. One needs to be strong for war. One needs nerves of twisted steel. He thought of Napoleon, in that wonderful Marengo campaign. That was the way to fight. His weariness told him that he was not Napoleon. Yet, as he lay back, fagged to the limit, his mind travelled on beyond his outposts into the enemy's camp. He had spent a frightful lot of money. Would he have enough to go on? The sixpenny weekly would begin in a fortnight. That was madness. And how would the book and paper stalls take up the battle? This brigade business was wolfing money. "I'll hang on," he said, glooming at his image in the mirror. "I'll put in all I have, and hang on." The cab was slow. Motor cars have made plain the slowness of the cab-horse. Lionel shut his eyes. "What will the bookstalls do?" he kept asking. "Lord, I'm tired. I'm tired," he repeated. Napoleon had not tired. Napoleon had fought all day, upon a chess-board fifty miles long, and gone on ahead in the night. Phrases of the *Snip Snap* march arose in his mind, like living things. He smiled. "I've much to answer for," he muttered. He saw Lorenzo Ike, trembling with drink, leaning over a bar, trying to show a photograph of his wife. The photograph was of the size of a postage stamp. Mr. Ike carried it inside his watch-case. Mr. Ike had been rosy. "The sweetest lil woman," he repeated, "the sweetest lil woman." The whirl of the day made a blur of pictures in his mind. The day was like the memory of something which had happened long ago. Telegrams and drums and a rush of people. Endless streams of people. And to-morrow he would have to be up at five, to do the work of ten.

The cab turned out of Oxford Street into the Portman estate. It dragged along northward. Waking from a reverie, Lionel looked up in time to see Mrs. Drummond's windows. It was long since he had seen Mrs. Drummond. It was not long, really. It only seemed long. He had crammed so many of the great events of life into the last few months that it seemed like an eternity. He must go to see her. He roused himself to look back at the block of flats. His mind became bitter for a moment. He was going home to Rhoda, who did not care, did not care two straws, for a work which he was doing with his heart's blood. Suppose that he were going home to Mrs. Drummond. He bit his lip savagely. His mind shifted by its own weariness to an interview with the head of the All Red Press. "Brute," Lionel muttered. "I've got to see him to-morrow. I'd give ten pounds to be able to stay in bed till noon." After this his thoughts went surging in his mind. Mrs. Drummond, Rhoda, sunsets, the crags of Las Palmas like bloody spears, the charge of an infinite infantry going over a ridge, a sea like a cantering cavalry with flashing flags. The drums of the march beat up. He was dropping bombs upon a world. Or was he scattering sugar plums? Presently the bombs would burst. Or was it sugar plums? Mrs. Drummond was coming to bathe his forehead. He did not wake till the cabman, peering through the hatch, had prodded him with the whip-butt. He crept silently upstairs. It was after midnight. The lifts were not working. At the end of his long climb he let himself in by his latchkey.

CHAPTER VII

To Rhoda the day had been one of revelation. It happens sometimes, but not very often, that the inner and the outer impressions work together to create a mood. They had wrought together, now, to excite her about her husband. The weather was partly responsible. A cool, brisk, sunny autumn day, without wind, disposes man and beast to virtue. She had risen late, after he had left the house. This touched her. She was a little ashamed that Lionel should have gone, on such a day, without a message of goodwill from her. She reproached herself for that. She ought to have seen him to wish him success. Her self-reproach made her judgment of him charitable. It was horrid of her, she had been a pig. Poor Lionel. How he must have felt it. "I will go down to the office," she said to herself, "I'll see him, and tell him, and ask him to forgive me."

As she dressed, she thought of him very tenderly. People who have hurt cruelly often salve their souls with liberal washes of emotion. Blessed are they against whom we sin; for they make us forgive ourselves. She dressed with care, trying several veils before she saw herself perfect. She stood for a long time before the glass, making little mouths at herself, patting a bow of blue gauze below her chin. He had liked her in those blue veils. He should like her again. She wondered whether it would be difficult for her to obtain permission to see him. He would be surprised and pleased.

On her way to the office, she realised the bigness of Lionel's achievement. It was everywhere, in the streets,

on the omnibuses, in the mouths of people. *Snip Snap*, the new weekly, only a penny. *Snip Snap*, the new catchword. She felt a new, very real excitement when she saw for the first time a Brigade boy besieged by buyers. When she came into the Strand she could not trust herself to alight. She feared the crowd. She could never have fought to the office door, through all that mob. Even if she had reached the office she could not have faced Lionel, she was too deeply moved. The bands and the noise and the excitement had taken it out of her. Pushing up the hatch with her trembling gloved fingers, she called to the cabman to drive her home. When she re-entered the flat, she found that the servants had learned the news. They wore green and white bows on their dresses. They smiled at her as one smiles at people visibly of the same faction.

"How pleased Mr. Heseltine 'll be, mum," they said. Soon after lunch, an interviewer came to see Lionel. She gave him coffee and cigarettes. While he smoked, she told him a very little of the little that she could remember of Lionel's ideas. "His charming wife received me in her pretty drawing-room. It is an open secret that Mr. Heseltine, a firm believer in early marriages, was married only last June." She pleased the interviewer. Would she sing him the *Snip Snap* song. She blushed very prettily, but refused. She could not. After he had gone, another came, to beg for photographs of herself, Lionel, their home, their sitting-room, etc., etc. When he had gone, Mrs. Drummond called. Mrs. Drummond did not share her excitement. Rhoda gathered from her manner that she had come in the hope of seeing Lionel. She had become very sensitive to that form of feminine attack. She was not so clever as Lionel; she knew that. She was not even interested in the things which interested him. She had already suffered much from sitting silent while

clever women talked with him, drawing him out in her presence, flicking his vanity with little pretty tempting praises. She was cold to Mary Drummond, thinking, bitterly, that Mary had come to pick Lionel's clever brain, not to see her. She shrank into herself behind manifold ice. "You think me giddy, and a temptress, and a fool," she thought. "I won't show you anything of myself." She showed a distant mask, "icily null." Mary Drummond came away wondering what key would open that lock. What was the secret of Rhoda, for what did she care? She was disappointed, less in failing to see Lionel than in failing to leave the seeds of a friendship. She was sorry for Lionel. She saw in Rhoda many acquired refinements guarding an inner emptiness. "One of civilisation's mistakes on the way to perfection." Nature tries all ways, being the only unhurried creature. In times of untroubled peace, earth is strangely patient with her mistakes; in troubled times she soon hides them. Mary Drummond reflected that a want of passionate interest is an irreligious state, the satanic, or nescient state, by which nations are destroyed. She was too wise to foretell disaster. The friends of the couple, prejudiced and short-sighted, had foretold disaster for them, on the ground that they were unsuited. "No human soul," she thought, "is ever suited to another soul. There is a fever that blinds one to the truth. The suiting of two souls is the work of years. Love comes after trying many ways, suffering and being suffered. When the world has given its batterings, and the man, having stopped crying for the moon, has learned about life, love may begin, if there is anything in either of them. They will find out whether there is anything." Something told her that their finding out would be harsh, perhaps worse than harsh, bitter perhaps, life in wormwood. Well. Love and the other things worth having, are only to be won by

suffering. People who have not suffered know as much about life as the green leaf knows of the tree. "Oh, many a year must pass and many a pain." Mary Drummond knew about life. Something of its sadness and beauty was in her face. Life had not been sweet to her. She had realised long ago that life's purpose is not sweetness; but that a nature is made sweeter by it. The earth wins in the end; but he respects the manful wrestler. He gives a largeness and a kindness, things very good to have in the nature, when one goes out into the night, knocking one's way in the dark. She wondered to what heights these two souls might rise.

After she had gone, Rhoda paced up and down, feverishly excited. This great scheme was partly hers. London was shouting for Lionel. She had seen a London crowd cheering him. It had never come home to her till then that Lionel was intimately hers. The thought that she, his ally, did not quite deserve that praise was a cold douche upon her. How could she show her realisation of what he was? She had to make amends for so much. The crowd could cheer him. It was reserved for her to give him the praise that would mean much to him. The reality of life came to her in a flash, making her draw her breath. It was not so terrible. There was a fear in her lest it should be terrible. Nervously she peered into the future. She saw other women giving him that praise, Mrs. Drummond, and the clever women like her. Like many women she was merciless to her sex in questions of possession, merciless to the other sex in questions of law. She saw so clearly the clever woman "making herself the sister of his spirit," by discreet feminine manœuvring, subtly contemptuous of the less clever wife. She saw herself in a position without dignity as the reward of her own cowardice.

Dora came to tea. She was not excited, that was not

her *métier*, but she fanned the excitement in her friend by saying that Lionel had surprised her.

As Dora was going, a barrel organ in the road burst out with the *Snip Snap* march. "That is fame," said Dora, going.

Fame. It was fame in a way. It was success, notoriety. It was the newspaper triumph that had always seemed to her so smart and difficult of achievement. It was here, now, hers. It was very new and very wonderful to her. Lionel, as a famous man, was a new Lionel. The world, with this new excitement in it, was a new world. She sat staring into the fire for long minutes, aghast, yet, in a way, happy. At dinner she could not eat. She felt as though a spirit had entered into her, making her shudder. After dinner she rose up. "I will welcome him," she said to herself. "I will welcome him." Going to her room she decked herself in her choicest clothes. She dressed her hair as he had loved it. "I am beautiful," she murmured, looking at herself in the glass. "I am beautiful for him." Settling herself into his chair in the study she fell asleep, waiting for him to come in to receive her praise. Her old colour was in her cheek. She slept like a little child breathing gently. She had a power of sleep. The march of the clock never woke her. The dropping of letters on the doormat half roused her now and then. "It is not Lionel," she murmured. Then she drowsily smiled and slept again.

At last, after midnight, Lionel came home. He fumbled with his latch-key like an old man weary of life. He was dog tired. He groped about for the switch, turned on the light, listened for an instant at Rhoda's door, and then walked softly to his study. To his surprise the door opened before him. Rhoda stood there.

"Come in," she said. She went to him. She put

her hands upon his shoulders. Blinking at her from weary eyes, he saw that she was dressed in the kimono which she had worn when he first met her. The old colour was in her face. She had been sleeping. The flush of sleep was on her. Her hair was "done" in the simple Greek style which pleased him. She was radiant.

"Poor boy," she said, "you're worn out." She drew him gently to the armchair and arranged a cushion for him. She had soup, toast, and an egg-nogg prepared for him. She waited on him as though he were a child. She stroked his hand. She caught it to her cheek with the humbleness which had moved him long ago. The room was littered with evening papers.

"Dear," she said, "I'm so glad it's been a success. I went down into the Strand to see. And I've been reading the papers. The papers are full of it. I knew you'd have a success."

He stroked her hand. "Success," he said. "It's not a success yet. The fight's only just begun. Look here. You ought to be asleep. You oughtn't to have stayed up for me."

"I ought to have been with you in the office," she said. "Helping you all I could."

"I'm too weary to scold you. And you've been a good person," he said. "It was thoughtful of you to get all this ready for me." She was sitting on the arm of his chair. She drew his head against her side.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"I'm too weary," he said. "I'm too weary. Rhoda. Get me up at seven to-morrow. I've an awful day before me." He rose to his feet, half-asleep. She rose, too. She made a movement towards him. The sleeves of the kimono fell back, showing the gleam of her arms. She crept against him, hiding her head upon him.

"Lionel," she said. "I ought to have helped more."

"Helped more," he said, stupidly. "It's a man's job, little one."

"Dear," she said, twining her arms about him. "I want you to let me help more."

He looked at her, full of sleep, much too tired to come to her mood. "We'll talk of it to-morrow," he said. A thrill passed to him from her. He touched her cheek and throat. She leaned to his touch, drawing her cheek against his finger tips. "Pussycat," he said. She caught one of his fingers between her lips.

"I will help, Lionel," she said, "I'll learn to help. And . . . Lionel."

"Yes, dear wife."

"I've not been a very good wife."

"Haven't you?"

"I'm not clever at science. There's so much of you I can't help." She drew him to her. "Only . . . Lionel."

"Yes, dear."

"I'm so proud." He caressed her hair, looking into her eyes.

"Nice hair," he said gently.

"Lionel."

"Yes, dear?" He turned her face to the light, while he gazed down at her. "You've got such a funny little bridge to your nose," he said. He touched it. "It's like no other in the world." The remark jarred upon her. He was on the external plane. He was trying to keep her there.

"Poor boy, you must sleep," she said. "You won't have more soup?"

"No, thanks. Good-night, dear." She sighed. She stooped. She hid her disappointment by picking up the newspapers.

"I'll leave word on my slate," she said, "for Susan to call you at a quarter to seven. I hope you'll sleep well."

He walked slowly to the door, yawning. He stopped at the door.

"You'll go to bed?" he said. His attitude suggested that he was conscious of something unusual. She ought not to be up at this hour.

"Yes. It's very late," she said. The clock gave a little chime for the hour, and struck one. The church clocks of London chimed. Up there in the stars they could hear a dozen together. One noble tone spoke to the spirit.

"Big Ben," he said. "The wind's drawn southerly." He made a note in his pocket book.

"What are you writing?" she asked.

"A note for my brigade, in case of rain," he said.

"How splendid your brigade looked, dear."

"Oh, the brigade," he said, "yes." The worry of the next day was strong upon him. He sat down despondently, thinking. "I wish I'd never started that brigade," he muttered.

She was quick to see his trouble. She stood by the table looking at him. Her right hand rested on the newspapers, now neatly folded. Her left hand patted her hair, so that the sleeve fell loose, showing the grace of her arm. Her colour glowed, her eyes were bright. She had dressed to win him. She saw his weariness with the contempt which women feel for weary men. Weariness is a rival. Her mouth smiled, but behind the smile the woman in her clenched her teeth. He looked so dead beat. And the beautiful she was waiting for him. "Can't I make him come to me?" she muttered. She spread her arms, standing quite still, with her head thrown back. He rose.

"I must rest," he said. "I don't know why I'm stopping here."

"Yes. Go to bed and rest," she said. "You want rest."

To her surprise he came to her. He looked so bloodless with fatigue that she shrank from him. She saw what he would be when he was old. The instant of repulsion passed.

"Lionel," she said.

"Yes, dear?" The emotion in her yearned to fold him. She was maternal.

"You poor, tired boy," she said. She took hold of him. "I'm going to kiss your eyes to sleep."

"They won't need much kissing," he said. "Put out the light, will you? It hurts." The switch was on the table, below the reading lamp. She turned the snap. The glow died along the wires. They were in firelight. Her arms went about him.

"Lay your head on my shoulder," she said.

"Ah, no, dear."

"Yes. I want it. Do what you're told. Coming home tired at one in the morning."

In his bedroom, a cool sponge refreshed him. She sponged his face and hands. He was so weary that he could not check her when she began to unlace his boots. He felt the cool, soft, grateful pillow. It seemed to close about his head, shutting out the world.

"Lionel, dear." Shame pricked him. He had not been very kind to Rhoda.

"Yes." His hand stroked the kimono sleeve. Her hand closed upon his!

"You'll always have Rhoda, even if the work's a failure."

"Do you think it'll be a failure?" he asked. His nerves were on edge at the thought.

"No, dear."

"You're not very sure about it."

"Yes. I am. Quite sure."

"Well. I'm not," he said ungraciously. He shut his eyes, thrusting his head further into the pillow. "I

must sleep," he muttered. He slept. Rhoda looked at his face, already blank with sleep. She crept out of the room on tip-toe, shading the light with one hand. She stole into her own room, flung up the window, and stood there, looking out into the night. Her thought was, "This is to be life. To win through the day alone, to dress carefully, in the way he likes, to let him in, half dead with fatigue, at midnight, and to have the wifely privilege of keeping him from going to bed in his boots. Her hands were soiled from touching his boots. She washed them, with a quotation from Macbeth. She shut the window, and whisked the curtain across it. She walked dejectedly to the fireplace. She stood there, staring into the coals. On the mantelpiece were little photographs in silver frames. They were the photographs of her friends. Dora, Milly, Lionel. One of them was of Colin Maunsel. She picked it up, thoughtfully. She glanced at the door to be sure that it was shut.

She looked intently at the photograph. It was like him. That indescribable look of the sea which made him so different from other men came out in the photograph a little. She tried to define it to herself, but could not. It was in the look of the eye accustomed to wide horizons, it was in the flex of the mouth accustomed to authority, it was, a little, in the whole face, a strangeness, as of one shut off from normal life, unused to women. It was not a handsome face. There was something thin and wanting in it. Looking at it, she felt a pity for him. People had told her that they had not been kind to him in the Navy. She had not been kind to him. Perhaps life had been unkind to him. Poor Colin.

She sat down, very wretched, still holding the photograph. Colin had not forgotten her. Colin would not have slighted her. If she had married Colin, perhaps

it would all have been well. She knew Colin now. That minute at the farm, when the blood burned in their faces. She knew. He knew. "Oh, Colin, Colin," she cried. "I was cruel to you, dear. But women have to be cruel. You don't know, dear. Oh, but you know now. You understand. And I'm miserable. He only cares for his work. He doesn't care for me, not for the real me." She got up, to dry her tears at the mirror. "You don't care for me, Lionel," she said, sobbing. "You don't. You know you don't. But other people would be very glad to care for me. Oh, Colin, Colin, I wish we were dead together somewhere on the hills." She had a pathetic sight of two white faces senseless in the fern, with the rain falling on them. "That would be peace," she thought. "Up there on the hills." Drying her eyes, while her misery fattened on the melancholy picture, she flung herself upon her bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE days passed, bringing heavy burdens for Lionel and Rhoda. They brought the burden of a life in common imperfectly shared. The work claimed Lionel more than he had expected. He had hoped for a greater ease after the publication of *Snip Snap*. It was not granted to him. After *Snip Snap* he had to prepare and publish his illustrated weekly, *S.S.T.* After *S.S.T.* was published he tried again to begin a reasonable life at home; but it was not to be. Rhoda, who had once longed for him to be at home with her, now seemed offended by his presence there. At first, as he knew little of women, he had no clue to her mind. He accepted her schemes for amusement, without suspecting that they were planned so that she might not be alone with him. Until Christmas time he was her unsuspecting footman, engaged in taking her to dinners and theatres, or carving for her guests. The old cause of estrangement was not discussed by him. He was not going to trouble her. Her wish was "not to be near him." Living in the same flat, going to the same friends, sitting in the same rooms, brought her near to him a hundred times a day. A word, a touch, a gesture had power to "trouble" her. The wisest, most sensitive man could not have kept the peace a day. Being neither very wise nor very sensitive he "troubled" her several times daily, and was shown that he did so. "Nerves," he thought. "Nerves. What kind of life did her mother lead that the child should live behind spears like this?" He thought of women married to animal men. "Perhaps that explains the shrinking,"

he said to himself. "The father is a beast. I can understand a woman shrinking from him." Meanwhile, life went on, little like life.

After Christmas, Dora came to stay with them. She came on the heels of a telegram. Rhoda wrote to put off a long-promised visit to Mrs. Drummond.

After some talk with Dora, she regretted her haste. Colin Maunsel was in town, staying at the Eric Hamlins, expecting them to call. She caught Lionel's hand to her cheek as he passed her.

"Lionel, dear," she said, "you must go to Mrs. Drummond. You were right. I was selfish. Only, I can't. You must go alone. Will you go out and send a telegram? Say that my letter was a mistake. She'll only just have got it. And say you'll come. It'll be nice for you. I'd like you to have that time in the country."

He did not understand the volte face; but her manner was too sweet (caressing, even) for him to be suspicious. The thought of being with some one who would talk ideas was pleasant to him. Rhoda's talk was anecdotal, conventional, and reminiscent. Lionel had grown weary of that kind of talk. So he was to go down to Mrs. Drummond.

"Very well," he said, musing for a moment. "I'll telegraph." He picked up a telegraph form and walked towards the door, framing a message as he went. Something made him glance at the mirror over the piano. He could not define the impulse. It was one of those promptings from beyond us that alter life. He saw Rhoda signalling triumph to Dora from behind his back. Glancing wearily at Dora who sat a little to his left, he saw her receive the message, smile, and instantly suppress the smile. He shut the door behind him lest he should see Rhoda clapping her hands in dumb show.

"So it was to get rid of me," he muttered, bitterly.

The next thought was that she had been getting rid of him for weeks in scores of subtle ways unnoticed by him. He remembered looks, acts, little wheedlings. "So I was being managed all the time," he muttered. He went into his study, crumpling the telegraph form.

Her heart, left to itself too long, had taken another image. His absences, once so hateful to her, were now longed for, schemed for. When he was away she was free to indulge that image to her heart's content, decking it with the flowers of sentiment, giving it life from the intensity of her longing. We are bidden to refrain from making graven images, and to keep ourselves from idols. Those who make an idol by the indulgence in bitter heartache, rather than face something hard in life, prepare a sensual feast. They brew poison, when they might drink tonic. They cast out into the air an invisible web, slimed with sweet sickly stuff, attractive to a kind of fly. They send out spirits able to enter into hearts, able to beguile them. Spirits of sentiment are the only evil spirits in civilised communities. They destroy life at the root. No men, and few women, are safe from them. The strong may detect their presence by asking honestly of an emotion, "What life will this thing make?" or if they prefer it, "What figure would this thing cut in print?"

Lionel came in to tea that afternoon. Rhoda asked if he had sent his telegram.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to Mrs. Drummond." Perhaps had he gone, things would have ended differently.

After that, he made little effort to be much at home. He was glad that his work kept him much away. Rhoda was glad, too. But her day-dream was no longer sweet to her. The image was too strong for sweetness. It was a gnawing, brooding want in her heart, feeding on her tears, torturing her with dreams, sweet only by

contrast with the reality of Lionel. Lionel was a continual interruption, continually punished by her. She put slights upon him with neat, deliberate feminine malice. She thought him too stupid to know when he was being pricked. Bitter women make that mistake, and wonder that they have no votes. It was a time of misery to them both. To him, harassed as he was, night and day, by the knowledge that his papers were failing, it was a time of torment.

Things went from bad to worse at the office. *Snip Snap* and *S.S.T.* were not successes. After the first brilliant month their circulations dropped to a seventh of the original total. At that figure, they did not pay, they lost money. He tried to drum up the circulations by advertisements, competitions, supplements. All of these measures acted well at first, yet none did permanent good. They did but linger out the disease. He was fighting the newspaper world with a most imperfect weapon. The Brigade wolfed money night and day. He needed an enormous circulation to support the Brigade. The Brigade was a millstone round his neck. He recast *Snip Snap*, and issued it in a gayer format. All to no purpose. He could not make the paper sell. He did not know why it did not sell. Dunning, his friend, did not know, Miss Coleman did not know. Papers as vulgar, as silly, as cheap, as sensational, sold and sold well. His paper did not sell. He was forced to conclude either that the world was vulgar enough, which was comforting, if improbable, or that it was conservative in its vulgarity. There were other worries in the business. Jealousy, or a feeling of mutual contempt, had led to bickerings between the street newsboys and the boys of the Brigade. Some of the quarrel was due to the instinct that makes the sparrow peck the canary. But when the street newsboys formed an Association, on the lines of a Trade

Union, Lionel felt that an enemy had begun to work to bring the Brigade to an end.

He saw Mrs. Drummond once at this time. He drank tea with her at her flat one bitter day early in the New Year. She gave him an impression of the beauty of goodness, difficult to forget or to define. He took comfort from the thought of her. He could not think of Mary Drummond doing a false, a mean or unjust thing. "You would be noble and good," he thought, "in any of the tragedies of life. You would be noble and good in any of the temptations. I wish I were liker you, or had you nearer to me." It often happens that a little misery sharpens our sense of what is best in this world. In the same way, flesh sinks to its proper value when there is a hill to climb.

He came home one night, tired out with worry. He found Rhoda sitting over the fire, drying her hair, while Dora read to her from a little comedy of Labiche. Something in his face made Dora leave early, in spite of her friend's too obvious signals to stay. When she had gone Lionel turned to Rhoda.

"Rhoda," he said. "I want to tell you. This business isn't a success." She did not answer. She tossed back a fold of hair, so that she might see better. She looked him in the face. He waited for a word from her; none came. She waited as though he had not yet stated his case.

"I doubt if I can keep it going," he went on, dashed by her callousness. "I am putting in all I have."

"That's unfortunate," she said. "I suppose . . . But of course we shan't if you've put in all you have."

"Shan't what?"

"I was looking forward so to getting to Florence this April."

"Rhoda. I may be able to pull it round."

"Are you going to take me to Florence?"

"Florence will be impossible."

"Oh," she faced him, pitiless. "Then you will have lost all you put in?" He nodded, gulping.

"All we have?"

"Most."

"Then we are ruined?"

"Not yet. Things may mend."

"Oh, don't shilly-shally with me. You mean they won't mend, and can't mend. The long and the short of it is, we're ruined. What do you propose to do?"

He did not answer. He looked at her steadily, wondering if she could feel shame.

"What do you propose to do?" she asked again. "I've a right to know. You married me. I've got to suffer if you choose to play the fool."

"Don't talk of suffering," he said. "You'll have enough to eat and enough to put on, and enough to waste. It's a question of those boys and of something I'd set my heart on."

"My dear Lionel," she said, moving to the door, conscious that her hair gave the motion queenliness. She laughed a little nervous laugh. "My dear Lionel," she said again, pausing at the door, with a stage gesture, "I should recommend you to leave your romantic notions. Marriage and social regeneration don't agree." He walked up to her and looked into her eyes. "Some day you women—" he began. He stopped, fuming. "Are you bubbles, or what?" After that their wrath carried them over the brink into open war.

CHAPTER IX

LIONEL slept little that night. He rose, feeling wretched. His brain ached. He felt as though poison were running in his skull instead of blood. His nerves were tortured to a loathing of life.

As he sat at a lonely breakfast, he wondered why some people delighted in life. He remembered a silly woman who had said in his hearing that "life is good." Life good, he thought. He could not eat. "Life is not good," he said angrily. "Life is struggle dashed with fever." He was worried by his letters. Things seemed to tangle themselves before his eyes. He saw them tangle. The sight of their tangling gave his brain a horrible flopping feeling. It was as though he, the man, the spirit, were let fall suddenly by a brain no longer strong enough to support him. He was unable to force his brain to arrest the tangling. Like most men, he was little used to ill-health. He concluded, as most men do when their heads hurt, that he was going mad. He had once met a madman. He had been watching a cricket match in the Midlands, when a wild-eyed man, shambling up in a hurry, began to talk to him. The wild-eyed man broke off, at times, to applaud a late cut. Lionel noticed that the man never clapped for a drive. He cared only for the neat, nicking, slicing nicety of the late cut. "Oh, I could tell you a tale," the man said. "I could tell you a tale. You know, I have been mad. You don't know what I suffered when I was mad."

Lionel thought of madness. Would it be such a hell as sanity? To be comfortably, hopelessly mad, in a

padded cell. To be imperial Cæsar, for ever laughing at a straw. To be outside the machine of the world, out of all the gritting cog-wheels. To be outwardly a shaven fool, inwardly a god upon a comet. He rolled a cigarette. Mad or dead. Death. To be extinct. What happens to the blown-out flame? He lit his cigarette. The match glowed; the glowing died; the head dropped. "Even we, even so." Naldrett had said that all the great things of life enter the soul in sleep. When the body drops, when the flame is blown to its invisible essence, what comes, what happens? "What dreams?"

"Save me from dreams," he said. "Dreams. They're the red rags which keep the bull of the mind from horning folly dead. I want power. Power to change the world. O God, I want to make the world fine. Give me a little red blood upon my brain."

God had given China tea in a teapot. Lionel sipped a last cup, sucking in cigarette smoke between the sips. Afterwards he drove to the office in a taxi-cab. He noticed an affiche: "Great strike of Newsboys, exclusive."

It has been said that "misfortunes never come singly." It is partly true. Misfortune shakes the nerve, so that little things, not minded in a state of health, hurt like misfortunes. Lionel had a bad day at the office. There were letters, hints, accounts. They all told the same tale. *Snip Snap* was failing. He sat at his desk, staring blankly at his letters. He was not thinking. Thoughts from outside his brain came in and hurt. It was as though the evil imaginings of his enemies were wasps which had the power to enter in to sting.

Miss Coleman entered. "May I speak to you, Mr. Heseltine?" she asked.

He did not hear her. He had a vivid picture in his

mind of Rhoda standing in the sun, glowing. He was so wretched that he could have abased himself to Rhoda, knelt to her, even, asking her to make it up. If she were beaten, he was beaten, too. Two beaten souls should be gentle to each other. They would understand, being beaten. They might go on together. Might come, in the end, to life. But why go over it all again? What is she? he asked. The beautiful, charming woman, delicate and delightful, accomplished, expensive, all on the surface. Below the surface, nothing. Selfishness, perhaps, pretentiousness, tactlessness, want of all nobleness, want of everything except the deadness of the deeply vulgar. She was the American spirit cropping out in another place. England was surely rotten. A longing came to him to mass all the strength of England against that death, wherever found. To knock the skulls of the chatterers.

"We were fine. We were fine," he said. "We were fine in the eighties, before America came in."

"What were you saying?" Miss Coleman asked. She had been standing quietly, waiting for him to speak. She knew that he had the power of passing into a chamber of his brain, out of hearing of the world. He roused himself. He turned, wearily.

"I was thinking of Meredith," he said. "You've read Meredith?"

"Yes," she said. "I've read him all." He pulled up a chair for her without stirring from his seat. She sat.

"We were fine, when he wrote," he said. "I wonder if we're done." He looked at her fine, strong face. She had a straight sensitive mouth. Her eyes were honest. She was fine. It came to him suddenly that accomplishments are very poor things. A good strong, wholesome body, and the power of caring for work and people. The rest is all fever. No, Good Lord. It is the

American varnish which covers rottenness. Miss Coleman noted the weariness of his eyes.

"No. Of course we're not done," she said, smiling. "We're only just beginning. We wear out a machine once a century. We get too big for our cradles. You know, you're all wrong, Mr. Heseltine. You think it's the life which wears out. It isn't, it's the machine."

"Yes. You're right," he said. He was not sure of it. He tried to think of it. His mind was too weary for thought. He saw her point fading away before him as he advanced to grasp it.

"You want to speak to me?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "I want to speak to you about the Distributors Associated."

"What about them?" She glanced towards the door. It was shut.

"Well, begin," he said. "They're starting an opposition scheme and want to nobble my staff. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Yes," said Lionel. He stared dully at the brass on the catch of his desk. He seemed to be thinking hard. He was thinking that the brass needed cleaning. "I noticed that the staff stared hard at me," he said. "So they think I'm done, do they?"

Miss Coleman was touched by his defeat. There was bitterness as well as weariness in his voice.

"It's going very well in the provinces," she said. Quickly she saw that that was not what troubled him.

"You needn't be afraid of them leaving you, Mr. Heseltine," she said. "You've been too kind to us."

"Kind?" he said. "Good Lord." He grinned. "I've sweated the lot of you. You, too."

"Oh, no, Mr. Heseltine."

"So they're starting an opposition paper, are they?"

he thought. "And part of the fun is to rob me of my staff when I least expect it." His mind was bitter.

"They're quite right, Miss Coleman," he said. "*Snip Snap's* not a success."

"Oh, but it will be, Mr. Heseltine." There were tears in her eyes. He shook his head.

"The Brigade's a millstone round it." Her mouth quivered. A month or two ago the sight of her tears would have made him swear. Worry had gentled him.

"And one so poor to do him reverence," he said, whimsically. He was braced. He took his hat and coat. "I must go out," he said. "Meanwhile, there's nothing to cry over. I wouldn't bother about it. Whether I sink or swim, there'll be work for you here, for at least another year. Write to Stantons about the plates, Miss Coleman. Oh, and tell William to get some Pinker, I can't have this brass in this state." He went out.

He turned down Norfolk Street to the Embankment. The memory of having walked there once with Mrs. Drummond gave him a little peace. He walked along the Embankment hardly noticing what he was doing. Below the statue of Brunel he realised that he had come from the office to get away from his work. He seemed to be living on half a dozen different planes at once. He was spending much of himself on each plane. He kept telling one of his half a dozen selves that he did not care about Rhoda. Then all five selves would thrust him with a pang of hell into the sixth. He knew, then, that he did care. He looked at Brunel. Brunel made blocks, all exactly alike. It was in Macaulay. But Rhoda was unlike every one. Rhoda's colour, her hair, her way. She walked in his brain, delicately dressed. He saw her turn to him. He saw the veil of the blue of the devil's bit scabious. He had a glimpse of the beauty which had made the world his at moonrise on

Ponton Hill. He realised, as one does in states of mental exaltation, whether they are caused by pain or joy, the pathos of the tragedy. This was happening in his life. This fever was his life. And life is the murmur of a bee from one open window to another. He would be old soon. Rhoda would be old. They would be bald, toothless, bloodless. Their jaws would drop. They would stiffen. The blinds would be drawn down. Washers would come; layers out. Oh, indignity of death. Then out, under the blankness of board, to the tidding of a lump of earth. Then shovelsful, shovelsful, blackness, blankness, for ever. For ever. Oh, against that, youth with the quick blood should join hands. There should be a league. How can one face age without a memory of youth? How go down among the bones of earth without the knowledge of the soul? Rhoda and he should be singing a song together, if only to have a tune to hum when age broke the voice with coughing.

He would make that plain to Rhoda. She would see. They had gone all wrong, somehow. Their nerves had been racked. Only, that time at Ponton. And another day, white like the first, in a boat on the Drowse. They had moved under alders, in the smell of meadowsweet, near a mill. Water trickled over the fall. He had minded the noise of water ever since. A heron stood, watching, as though he were wise and the water truth. Grey-blue the heron. Grey-blue, and legs like stalks. A kingfisher flashed. Rhoda had told him that she had not known what caring meant. "I was a girl till you came. There, dear, I'm a woman. I can't tell you more."

What had happened since those days? Sickness, worry, life's destroyers. They must make a pact to bear with each other. Life was dark for a moment. The river was going through a culvert. It would come

out into the sun again. They should row swiftly to the sun, not drag the arches on to them. Suppose he were to take her away. Not to Pudsey; that would be bitter. But to some other beautiful place. A place in Shropshire, a place in the Cotswolds. They would see the hills again. He knew the hills. In the summer the stones are sun-bleached, and the air smells of honey. There is honey under the ground. In the winter one sees the fell, the cold white of the cloud, the cold blue of the sky, the earth like a man asleep. They could take hands there. It would be peaceful. Thatch, the teams jangling, plod of beasts. Frost on the window, geese grazing, an apple-loft, the noise of pigeons. They could make up their minds. They could make up their lives. Ponton was only a foretaste. The human soul contains all things, can do all things. Two human souls. Surely two human souls, pledged to make their life on earth happy, vowed to do it, resolved to do it, can do it, could do it. Hard at first, perhaps. An effort, a strain. She was beautiful. He could forgive. He was interesting. She could endure. It was worth it. It meant all life to both of them. And at the end, in a few months' time, when they had come to the knowledge, when they understood, how childish this trouble would seem. And now it was wrecking their lives, destroying them. Life is worth an effort. There is no life without effort. They must make the effort. Only, there was his work. How give that up? It was giving him up. Yes. But with Rhoda at his side he would turn the fight the other way. It was the doubtful instant, when the rally succeeds. And in the end, when he had done his work; when his machine for moulding minds had made the mob cry for life as loudly as it cries for blood. Oh, it was a big thing, a big thing. Rhoda must see that. She must be with him.

He saw his study. He saw the two heads together

over the desk. He felt the quick mind with his, helping his. That determined him. "I must go to her," he said. In a motor cab he thought of the happy life. A man's life, no shadow of a woman in it. A cavalry of comrades going over a llano towards the Andes. Campfires at night, horses picketed, stars. In the morning, a cantering on, breasting the air, towards the Andes; but never reaching the Andes, going on for ever. Oh, the content of cantering. The silver jingling, the horses proud, going over the llano for ever. At times a Gaucho spurring forward would scream, swinging his bolas. All the cavalry would cry. A thunder of hoofs, clods aloft, serapes, ponchos, shouts. "All very well," he thought, "but I would be happier with my girl." He let himself in with his latch-key.

Lionel glanced at the umbrella-rack. The umbrella with the Egyptian handle was there. Rhoda had not gone out. He had often chaffed her about the handle. It was a symbol. Some day he must look up Egyptian symbols. All wisdom is hidden in symbol. All wisdom has been discovered; little has been applied to life; some has been forgotten. Egyptian magic. A controlling of agencies by mental disciplines. He must study magic. He and Rhoda. He tapped at Rhoda's door.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"I am," he said. "Can I speak to you? Can I come in?" He heard her cross the room to the door. The key turned. She held open the door for him to enter. Though she said "Good-morning" the wrath in her heart made an icy mail about her. He felt it. He could not have drawn near to kiss her. No man could. Her thought was, "So he comes to make it up. He comes too late. That should have been this morning before he went to the office." Her bitterness made a false reason for itself. "I am not to be second to his work." It steeled her heart against him.

She had expected him early that morning. When he passed to the bath-room, she was waiting for him. She wanted him. She might, perhaps, have pardoned, had he submitted. He was in the wrong. He ought to have come. She had waited and waited. The night had not been so pleasant to her. He must have known that she was waiting. But no, he had gone out. His feet passed her door; re-passed. He had not thought her worth the trouble. His work had claimed him.

The bitterness of her wrath gave another sweetness to her inner life. He could not share that. He had no part in that. She rang for Susan. She would breakfast in bed. The clang of the door as he went out made her clap her hands. She was alone. She was free. The freedom thrilled her with a delightful sense of naughtiness. She was free for a whole day of delicious brooding. As she sponged her face and did her hair, she tightened her lips with disdain at the thought of Lionel. "How nasty men are when they are tired." The hot water was delightful. She felt that she was sponging away that nasty memory. "His eyes were all cod-fishy and bloodshot." An ounce of civet, good apothecary.

After she had breakfasted in bed, she dressed with extreme care, as though the man in her mind were coming to lunch with her. When her room was ready for her, she locked herself within. There was a good fire. She sat before it, feeling many delights. The delight of freedom, the delight of being beautifully dressed, the delight of warmth. But all ministered to the supreme delight. The supreme delight was to brood over Colin. They walked the world together in her brain. She rose to greet him. She rose to greet him in many rooms, in many different dresses. Dear eyes, dear face, and great strong hands. Oh, the welcome. How she drew him to sit beside her, helped him to shine.

How he noticed what she wore, and praised it and delicately touched it. They rode together over the hills into lands where no one would ever find them. The horses drew side by side. It was sunset. They were at a castle door. What was within the castle? A secret needing two words. "Rhoda." "Colin." Ah, and what a giving of hearts in those two words. Or they were alone, by firelight, at twilight, in some old, old house where the clock was ticking. It had all been different. They were each other's, for ever each other's. His dark eyes were looking down at her.

"Rhoda, my beloved."

"Oh, Colin."

"Rhoda. Are you happy?"

"Happy, Colin?"

"Kiss me, Rhoda."

"My own."

Or she was coming back to him after an absence. Coming back at night, looking out for the light in the window, seeing him black against the light as he looked out. Ah, if it might have been. O Colin, if I had only known.

It was bitter; but there was pleasure in it. So much of her life was lived for him. He had liked that way of doing her hair. She had done it for him in that way to-day. She wore a little brooch which he had praised. She held a book which he had given her. Meredith's *Poems*. There was an inscription by him. "Rhoda Derrick, from her friend Colin Maunsel, June 4th '07." He wouldn't have written "her friend" unless the blood were singing in him. She kissed the inscription. He must have kissed it too. She kissed, very fondly, the little photograph. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes brimmed. She laid the photograph in the crook of her right arm, so that she might kiss it there, as though she held him. For a long time afterwards she sat still,

caressing his image in her heart. Dear Colin. Memories of him became vivid in the limelights of sentiment. She lived over old hours. A day in the garden with him, playing tennis. A dance at the Compton Maunsels. Ah, that dance, and the white she wore. They sat out a Lancers under a yew in the light of a Japanese lantern. She replayed that act with other words, sweeter words.

"How far away the music sounds."

"My music is not far away." A pause. She with head turned from him, the air electric, the blood dizzy. Then she,—

"I think the waltz is beginning."

"Our waltz, Rhoda. The waltz of Life. You my music and my partner. Rhoda. Rhoda. You must know." His hands caught hers.

Then the knocking at the door. Lionel back. Lionel asking to speak with her. How maddening. She went to the door drawing down icy blinds, icy shutters. Lionel with the bloodshot, cod-fishy eyes, after Colin. If he had touched her then she could have struck him.

They faced each other. "He shall not come in here," she thought. Colin sat in that room. His book and photographs were on the chair. Lionel should never trespass into the world which Colin shared.

"I'll be out in a minute," she said, coldly. "Put a log on the sitting-room fire and draw up the chairs." He went to do her bidding. She locked her door again with a little bitter smile of contempt. She changed her clothes in desperate haste. She entered the sitting-room resolved to make him sorry that he had left his office. He was standing by the mantelpiece. She sat down so far from the fire that he could either draw near or be forced to speak at her.

"So," she said, after watching him swallow once or twice. "What have you come to say?"

"Rhoda," he said. "Can't we make up our minds

to . . . to make our lives something more than they've been." He waited for her to help him out. She was still. She was not even looking at him. She was looking straight across the room, with her grey-blue, glassy eyes. He had never seen eyes with so little life in them. The inhuman, good or bad, have often just such eyes. There is an incompleteness in lighter shades.

"Well," she said. He began again, as she knew he would.

"Rhoda. We've got to look at things. We've got to face life. I want you to help. I know I've not made you happy. Only it's all been against us. If we could get away. Go into the country. Make a pact."

"We made a pretty solemn pact, last June, one would think," she said, bitterly.

"We made a pretty pact," he said, clutching at her words. "This must be the solemn pact. We're not the children who stood up at the altar last June."

"No, we are not," she answered. "So being grown up, we're to go into the country."

"Dear, if we could go to some peaceful place."

"Don't call me dear," she said rudely. "It sounds ironic."

"Don't make it so."

"And I am to learn my duties in the peaceful place. Study your whims. Pretend to love you. Come, at last, to your ways of thinking. Make you happy, as it is called."

"No, Rhoda. I'm asking you to make a clean slate. To give me another chance to make you happy." She looked at him.

"How clean a slate do you propose to make for me? I am flesh and blood. I've got a heart and soul. I'm beautiful. I could have married anybody. Many men wanted to marry me. I married you. I thought you

cared. I thought you cared enough to respect my point of view about certain things. I am myself and my own. And I am proud of myself. Or I was till I learned your loathsomeness. Ever since I married you I've loathed myself. I'm not your wife. Your work is your wife. Your work. A rag which I wouldn't have in the house. I am the housekeeper who is to degrade herself to you in your spare moments so that you may have children. Children. Oh." She shuddered. Her face worked. "Do you know what children mean to me? If I thought I were going to have a child, I'd kill myself. My Mother had children. She had nine children in eleven years. They all died except me and Jane. I was the last. I killed her. I got my love of children from my Mother. It's in my blood and in my bone and in my marrow. I'm not going through what my Mother went through." She shuddered again with physical repulsion. It was true. Something of her Mother's suffering had poisoned her. Lionel was moved. He understood.

"It's hard to get the truth from a woman," he said. "You ought to have told me."

"Women pay a big price for their trust in the male understanding."

"The devil gets the money, then," he answered. "Well. Cut that away, then. Even so, Rhoda, there's a possible life together."

"Till death do us part," she quoted. She saw him grown old. She saw the results of twenty years of wrangling. Two old bitter silent people facing each other over the fire. "Are you going to give up your work?" she asked.

"My work's my effort to justify my being here with a little power."

"It's not the work of a gentleman," she answered. He moved his mouth at that.

"There are better things than gentlemen," he answered.

"Not for husbands."

"No," he said, with bitterness. "Not for women. Not for idle, scented, lying women who'd see the world rot rottener than they make it rather than pawn a ring to save a sister from the streets."

"Don't talk to me like that," she said. Both were very angry. "How dare you talk to me like that?" He swallowed down his wrath.

"Well, then," he said. "Suppose I give up my work. I'm not going to be idle. Suppose I qualify. It's the only thing left. Qualify and buy a practice? I should be thirty-five by that time. And my five best years gone in being a schoolboy."

"That would be better," she said. She spoke gently, to prick him.

"No," he said, gloomily. "No." He walked to the window. On the window seat were some tiny memoranda books bound in green leather. He tapped the table with one of them.

"Put that book down, do," she said, pettishly. "I cannot endure to see you fidget." He turned to her.

"Rhoda," he said. "I will give up my work for a time. Dunning can take charge. Will you come away with me? Let's try." He stared out of the window. She shut her eyes.

She saw the life *à deux* in a hired cottage in South Devon or Cornwall. She knew then that the proposal came too late. The work which had been her rival was now her opportunity. It gave her peace from him. It gave her leisure for her dreams. She could dream of Colin all day long. And that was sweet to her. She had not realised how sweet. She could not give up that intimate dream-life. Oh! She saw that life in the cottage. Life at close quarters, all the round of the

clock. He would be at her side till she loathed the sight of him. And every moment of dream broken in upon by a question. "What are you thinking of?" "You look very thoughtful." Great muddy boots clumping in her lily garden.

"And that is what you propose to me?"

"Yes. I will leave my work."

"The proposal comes with a bad grace," she said. She spoke with a callousness which would have amused her had she been less angry. She meant her tone to nettle him to ask why. It had that effect.

"Why?" he asked.

"You've not yet apologised to me," she said, "for your behaviour last night. When you have made some amends for last night, it will be time enough." She paused, while she selected a barb for the last arrow. "Time enough for me to weigh my prospects as a partner in the mutual solace company."

She watched him. She felt a deep contempt for him. He thought that she would desert her heart's image at a word from him. Yet she was interested. What would he do?

He left the window. He walked slowly past her to the door. She could see that he was in a blazing rage. He flung the door open, with his usual outburst of "Good Lord," spoken as though each word were a rat which he worried before flinging. Susan was in the passage, cleaning the brass on the front door. Lionel walked towards the front door. Rhoda had not done with him.

"Where are you going?" she called. He gave no heed. She rose from her chair. She stood in the doorway looking after him.

"Lionel," she cooed, "where are you going?" He had to answer before Susan.

"Office," he said, choking.

"You'll be in to dinner?"

"No."

"Bad boy," she said. He did not answer. He looked back at her. He was standing by the half-open door. Susan stood behind the door. She had a cloth in her hand. She was shoving aside her tin of polish with her foot. Lionel looked straight back. His face was very weary. He looked at her as though she were a mare for sale. His thought was "Only maniacs are generous to women." He flamed. In the motor cab which took him back to the office he preached from that text. "The vulgarity of the incomplete," he said. "To be generous to that." The cause of his fury played a few triumphal bars upon the piano. She smiled a haggard smile at herself in the glass. A thought of what her thought would be, could Colin enter, made her blush. The passion in her fired her longing. Her thought, travelling long miles, came at last to the heart of an idle man as he sat under cover waiting for pigeons. It knocked. It entered. It was welcomed. A little rosy thought went back with a message.

CHAPTER X

MORE worry waited for Lionel at the office. He found Carnlow and Dunning examining half a dozen of the Brigade boys. The boys were bleeding and muddy. They seemed to have been roughly handled.

"Here you are at last," said Carnlow. "We've been waiting for you."

"What is it?" said Lionel, to one of the boys. "What's the matter, Vandy?"

"Bit of a scrap, sir. They was calling us 'Black-legs.' The Piccadilly pitch had to go off home."

"They come at us twenty to one," said another boy.

"Old Snorty cop one of them a beauty," said a third. "I saw 'im 'olding on to a lamp-post, or 'e'd a bin dahn and aht."

"Yes," said the others. "And then they all come at us."

"It was all them newsboys."

"One of em said, 'We're comin' to do you Blacklegs in.' 'All right,' I says. It 'd 'ave been all right if they'd got one of us down."

"Them newsboys it was. Like what they call the strikers."

"There's been more or less of this mobbing all over the West End," said Dunning.

"The worst of it is that the evening press has made it out that we're to blame. Here's the *Post Meridian*." Carnlow dismissed the boys, and handed over some evening papers. Lionel read, knitting his brows.

"The antagonism, which has amounted in some instances to actual mobbing, is likely to increase in the near future. In view of the fact that the Newsboys

United are striving to obtain fair rates of regular pay, the flaunting of the Brigade boys at each street corner can only be regarded as heartless, injudicious, and provocative to the last degree. The authorities should induce Mr. Heseltine to withdraw his men for a time from the West End pitches."

"Yes," said Lionel. "I thought that would come. You needn't stay, Dunning. Now, Carnlow. We'll see what we can do."

He sat down with Carnlow. They drafted a letter to the Newsboys United. They sent copies of the letter to the Press.

"You look a little Londony," said Carnlow. "Not over-doing it, I hope."

"One gets run down."

"How is my sister-in-law?" said Carnlow.

"Oh, she's very well, thanks." They lunched. At the next table a fat man was gorging meat.

"Lunch is an excellent substitute for thought," said Lionel, stirring coffee. "I suppose all things are, in the absence of test."

Outside, in the Strand, he saw two of the boys of the Brigade surrounded by half a dozen ruffians who were calling "Blackleg." As usual the public were taking the side of the majority. Lionel took his place beside the boys. He stood with them for half an hour, chaffing them. The act of standing there, in the midst of the evil faces, calmed him. Man becomes a soul when he steps from the mob in an act of protest.

As he stared at the mob, he hardened his heart against it. He hardened his heart against Rhoda. It was nothing to her that Englishmen looked thus, behaved thus. These men, jeering at the minority, carried evening papers in which the words "an Englishman's love of fair-play" occurred at least once. Their play was to sit once a week on a plank, smoking cigarettes,

while paid gymnasts kicked or hit a ball. There they were. All a town against three. And nobody cared a rush that all Thermopylæ was there in the gutter. "I'll not give up my work," Lionel muttered, "for all the wives in Christendom. Nor for all the middlemen in Jewry."

"Toff. Bleed'n toff. *Snip Snap*. Blackleg. 'At." The names followed him as he walked. He visited a couple of dozen of the Brigade's pitches. He talked with the boys who had been mobbed. Nothing serious. But the mobbers had disturbed Piccadilly. There would be police court proceedings. More trouble, more worry, more betrayal of mind. Lionel's heart sank as he became more weary. "The thing gets more tangled every minute," he thought. "The Brigade will end, and that'll be the end. But Rhoda. How is that to end?" He saw no end to the trouble with Rhoda. Time might end it. Chance might end it. Perhaps that was marriage. Perhaps all marriages were like that. A war of attrition. Ah, but it should not be that. "Have I been fair to her?" he wondered. Women are very breakable. Marriage is a bomb-shell dropped on habits. He could see no end. "Perhaps that is the curse of modern life," he muttered. "The men are too busy with great things and the women too idle with little things; and both sorts of things have come to mean more than life, and so life goes to the dogs."

A placard caught his eye. "Winter Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Members of the Society of Thirty-six." The door of a hall stood open. Few were entering. He entered, paid a shilling, received a catalogue. "Who are the Thirty-six," he muttered. "They must be pretty bad," he thought, "to be so many." Art is made by cliques, not by Academies. A great empty room stretched away to an inner room. "Big enough for two tennis-courts," he thought. The

walls were hung with pictures. In the middle of the room were red velvet settees, new, but already dusty. Half a dozen people lounged along the walls. A critic made pencil notes on his catalogue. Lionel went to the inner room and sat upon a settee in front of a view of Knocknarea.

“ But for Benbulbin and Knocknarea
Many a poor sailor would be cast away.”

“ I wish I were in Ireland,” he thought. His mind gave him the picture of wind-bitten beeches near the sea. He saw the drenched grass glisten. Though all was bright and green it was all misty and strange. A metallic creeper on the white wall of a house, blackbirds among the currants, pattering down rain drops, a field of buccalaun blazing. He saw a field sloping to the sea. There were rocks in it. Cows cropped there, though the pasture was all flags, rushes, meadowsweet, short hardheads, ferns. There was another flower there, too, beautiful exceedingly. It was the devil’s bit scabious, made small but perfect by the sea wind. Things are so related in this world, that, when one thing hurts, all other things have venom for us. He felt a little quick bitter stab through his soul. He would sleep that night in the same home. She would be within a few yards of him on the other side of the wall. And how far apart would their inner selves be?

A woman was looking at him, noting the intense fatigue of his face. She was in a dark grey dress rather like a dress which he had seen before. He raised his eyes to hers, just as she stepped quickly towards him. It was Mrs. Drummond.

“ Mr. Heseltine,” she said. “ How d’you do? ”

They shook hands.

“ What brings you here? ” she asked.

“ I was fagged,” he said. “ I wanted to think.”

"There's not much distraction here." She showed the walls. She was thinking that a man with a face like this needed a sea-voyage or a mountain-top.

"No," he said. "And what brings you here?"

"I'm looking at some drawings by little Polly Hamlin. They're down there in the corner."

"I like little Polly," he said. "Her heart is so warm." He rose from his lounge. "And if I don't love her," he muttered to himself, bitterly, "she'll do me no harm."

"Show me Polly's drawings," he said. They looked at them together.

"Marriage stops that kind of thing," he said.

"Don't be so bitter," she answered.

"They would be pathetic, if she were dead," he said. He said it gently. It struck her as being a strangely feeling thing for him to say. But what had made this young man suddenly sensitive? The soul of man, like a beefsteak, must be beaten tender. The world, a rough cook, spoils much in the process.

"Let us sit," she said. "You look tired." They sat.

"How is your wife?" she asked.

"Oh, very well," he said. "Very well, thanks."

"Do you think that she would give me a week-end at Coln St. Michael's?" she asked. It occurred to him that he had not talked with a cultivated, intelligent woman for a quarter of a year. He loved good talk. Her question gave him a mental picture of a talk by the fire about the eighteenth century. She would play Brahms, or perhaps Glück. Then they would go into the garden to look at the stars. They would talk of Arcturus and his sons, the waste of the competitive industrial system, the waste of this great kitchen of a land where the cream is poured down the sink and the tap never turned to flush it. And if they went, what part

would Rhoda play? Rhoda! The clever by attainment are at war with the clever by character. "And she is to choose the intellects mine is to meet," he thought.

He roused himself. "I'm sorry," he said. "I was wool-gathering."

"Do you think that your wife would come to us for a week-end?"

He shook his head. "I only wish we could," he said. "But I'm engaged."

"I've been following your work," she answered.

"Mrs. Drummond," he said. "I've been thinking of you, and of what you said about my work. I value what you said more than I did. I'll say this about my work. Nothing can be quite bad which takes out of a man what this is taking out of me."

"You never told me of the Brigade," she said. "You kept that back. I judged on faulty evidence, as one always does when one leaves instinct."

"Then you like the Brigade? I like you for that."

"I admire the Brigade. I thought you despised character."

"Character's the one thing worth having," he said. "It's everything."

"Art's only a coloured glass for the peep at truth."

"And Action's a day's work in the machine."

"Or a pebble in the cogwheel."

"No one knows which," he said, "except the historians who fight about it." He sighed.

"And the war? How does the war go?"

To any other person he would have lied, with an unmoved face. He looked at Mrs. Drummond.

"The war?" he said. "I'm learning from it. I suppose that's a good thing."

"What do you learn from war?" she asked.

"That's playing into my hands," he answered. "I'm a cynic."

"I'll forgive you," she said. "I've not talked with you for so long. There would be a freshness. What do you learn?"

"All the things which should have been foreseen. All the croaks for which one hanged the croakers."

"Your paper," she said. "Is that doing well?"

"I'd lie to anybody else," he said.

"It isn't, then?" He nodded, staring at his boots.

"I like being trusted," she said.

"I was too proud," he answered. "To win the fool's heart you must use the fool's machine. I was more on your side than we thought, Mrs. Drummond. The world is right. Only it makes one so mad. I had to hit." He sighed, still staring down. "I only made it angry."

"I shan't regret the paper," she said. "It was wrong. What I should regret would be the turning of your mind to cynicism. You aren't a cynic really. No creative mind is cynical. You must not let the defeat (if it be a defeat) make you less fine."

"They won't kill me," he said. "I shall come up somewhere else."

"Would it be possible for me to meet some of your boys?" she asked. "I've talked with some of them on their pitches. I should like to know more of them. They seem so nice."

He winced. It was a sharp reminder that the Brigade might have to be disbanded. All those boys thrown on the streets, forced to enlist, forced to emigrate, scattered, broken, starved, turned, by London's machine, into those ruins of men, who pad in rags after cabs. Boys with such courage and fun. He knew how they would take the disbanding. They would be quiet. "All right, Mr. 'Eseltine." Then, as soon as he had

gone, some wag would call "Wot O, the order of the boot," in a dead silence. Then plans, full of hope. "Wot price the lybour exchyng." All of them hopeless, really. How would five hundred get jobs in a frosty mid-winter with the builders out?

"They're a nice lot," he said gloomily. He sighed. "Good Lord," he broke out bitterly, "they're a grand lot. Why aren't they given a chance? This country wrecks more manhood than there is in the rest of Europe, and knights the men who wreck it."

"Oh," she said. "You don't mean that there's any chance of the Brigade ending?"

He nodded. "It may come to that," he said. In his mind he was wondering if he could hang on for another six weeks, to get them clear of the winter. He saw no chance of it. She quickened to him.

"Coming to an end?" she said. He noticed in her face a look of judgment made tender by understanding. "But it mustn't. It's your work. And it's so splendid." He shook his head. A longing to be justified from human lips seemed to promise a salve for his misery.

"What makes you so eager for it?"

"It's what I've longed for," she said. "To see some of the waste snatched up and organised. You've picked those boys out of the gutter and given them souls. She thought suddenly of the bigness of the collapse. "And there are five hundred of them?"

"It was a big thing to do on a cracked Correggio," he said. "If it had been a Titian it might have been a success."

"It will be a success," she said.

"Not all the King's horses nor all the King's men," he said. The utter hopelessness in his voice stung her.

"Can you tell me what you are doing?"

"Nothing. I can't think of anything."

"And how long?"

"I'm trying to get through the winter."

"But it can be saved," she cried. "All the good things in London are there by miracle. And the Brigade is the beginning of so much. It's so important that it should begin from below. 'Getting underneath to lift,' instead of reaching down a contemptuous hand."

"With a *nouveau art* ring on it," he muttered. She mused. Her great eyes burned.

"Would you take me as an ally?" she asked.

"Not a penny," he answered. "The Brigade's a bottomless sack."

"Not with pence," she said. "With friendship."

"Give me the friendship," he said. "But the Brigade's done." Weariness, like other ailments, makes bad spectacles. It struck her that like most sick men, he was flattering himself with misery.

"The paper may be," she said. "It never had life." She looked at him. "You're worn out," she said. "No wonder you're doing nothing." His bloodless lips moved. "You ought to be resting."

"Rest?" he said, stupidly. "It's not that which hurts. It's being unable to think."

"I know," she answered. "As though the head were full of clear soup."

He smiled. "That's better," she said. "Now, tell me. Are you alone in support of the Brigade?"

"Yes. It's my Brigade."

"It was gambling?"

"It was not, Mrs. Drummond. It was a boldness based on calculation."

"You thought your papers would succeed?"

"They'd succeed now, if I could only settle these middlemen."

"Yes. But the papers interested you. They were the important things to you. The Brigade was only a

means of distribution. And the Brigade's alive. That is so like modern thought. It makes every possible effort to escape from life. Anything rather than human beings."

"Anything," he said. "Anything in the world."

"I don't say that," she said, smiling. "But the problem is to save five hundred youths. You wouldn't surrender to the middlemen? It's a personal matter, your Brigade?"

"It is. I won't surrender. They couldn't handle the boys. It would become impersonal at once and lose all its value. Business men can't handle men. Business is without human relations."

"Could not you surrender the papers, then? Give them up. And then make an effort to keep on the Brigade as newsboys."

"Calling 'All the winners,' and smoking fags?"

"No. Supplanting all that. Now is the time. Think of this strike. How it helps you. The newsboys have behaved scandalously. They've put themselves quite out of Court. The papers would be glad. They'd be thankful. They'd rush to welcome you. You would give them a reputable means of distribution. And as the Brigade grew, you could take over the reputable members of the present system. There are some, I suppose. Oh, it could be done."

"If done now it would be black-legging."

"Well. 'It's better to be vile than vile-esteemed.' Your boys are mobbed anyhow."

He did not answer. She startled him with:

"Oh, but don't you see that that will lead on to the very thing you were trying for? And far more directly and certainly. Every act is a stone in the pond. The ripples spread to the banks. I see the Brigade stretching and stretching, from town to town, gathering and growing. And taking up other bits of life. Organising

them, too. It will be an army for the distribution of intelligence, all intelligence. Books. Science. Art. You would have a monopoly of distribution. You could stop the distribution of unintelligence."

"That would be worth doing."

"Everything's worth doing, even sin, if you do it with your life."

"Yes. Even commerce becomes almost manly when the risk is real." He marvelled at the life in her face. A few women have that look of thought running in the blood, of spirit so mixed with the flesh that the touch is spiritual. She was following the run of ripples as they glimmered on into the unseen.

"Give up your papers," she said. "And try it."

He grinned at her. "I don't think I realised life as a spirit before I met you," he said. "I used to think it a pathological condition. A disease recurring on the world's skin. I wish I'd your life."

"You have," she said. "Here I am. If I can help, I will."

"You help a great deal." She mused.

"That would save the Brigade," she said. "Go to Sir Pica Galley. You would have five thousand men under you in less than a year."

He sighed, thinking that the optimism of women is a surprise at being well re-acting on a want of knowledge. A bald, weary-looking man came slowly towards them.

"It's time," he said. "We're going to close the gallery." The couple rose to their feet.

"It might save it," said Lionel. They walked out of the gallery into a long, dusty passage hung with red rep.

"Tell me," she said. "Will the giving up of the papers mean a great loss to you?"

"I stand in with the boys," he said.

"You may be ruined, then?"

"Ruin?" he said. "I shan't become a cab-tout.

Ruin to me is a comfortable thing. You wouldn't cut me. The Hamlins wouldn't cut me. I shall go on as I am going. As long as I don't go mad, or get a pain too great to bear with dignity, it doesn't matter whether I'm ruined or not. It's what I bring the world that matters, not what the world brings me. My mind and my point of view won't be ruined. But, O Lord, I scraped those boys out of all the slums of the city tip. And there they are, as fine a force as you'd find, after half a year, going to be pitch-forked back to piggery."

"They aren't going to be. We'll save them. We'll ring up Sir Pica Galley and make an appointment."

By this time they were in the street. He led the way down a lane into a square. They saw branches traced across great windows. Lights were burning.

"It's a long time since we walked together," he said.

"Coln St. Michael is the place for walking. A river with kingfishers. They'll all be at the sea, now. And we've a Roman camp on the wold above. A good place for thinking, if you want the like of that. You look as though thought had hurt you lately. You must go home, now. Talk it over."

"I'll talk it over." He was wondering if the final surrender would touch Rhoda. If he gave up the papers, if he had no ties, no exhausting ties. Surely the marriage could be made a success. He remembered a soldier's proverb, 'Any man can become a good soldier if he gives his mind to it.' He had wanted an intellect beside his, and children at his knee. Rhoda had said that there should be no children. But there was Time. Time would change her. Time changes everybody who is anybody. Was she anybody? And the intellect beside his? There might be a kind of companionship. She would get a taste for his tastes, he for hers. He had faith in time. His mind ranged over Rhoda's character, like a plectrum trying the nerves. No. She

was empty. Women! He hated women. He thought bitter thoughts of women. Some few, he thought, were, or ought to be, mothers. A few more were fit (provided the men were not susceptible) to be men's friends. The rest. Oh, devils, devils, devils, sleek, purring kitten devils, little venomous snakes, vulgar to the bone, under the scent and the whiteness, without honour, without love, without mind, at once copious and empty, twining into heart after heart, to suck blood, then on again, heads erect, sweet, charming, sly, the devil's minions, the devil's invitation cards. In his weariness his mind thrust before him a picture of Rhoda, dressed in a blue kimono, sitting at table. Words from the Proverbs came to him: "The dead are there . . . and her guests are in the depths of hell."

"I am in hell," he said. He had forgotten Mary Drummond.

She faced him. "What is the matter? In hell? There is only one hell. Regret for the imperfect. You're strong enough to make good all that you've made badly." Her face was very beautiful in the lamplight in the dusk of the square garden. He saw something of her life in the great dark earnest eyes and strong, beautiful mouth.

"You've been in hell, my friend."

"I've been in hell," she replied.

"It made you a fine friend."

"I learned the joy of heaven."

"You never made things badly."

"Women's task is to see what men can do."

"Are you very tired?"

"I'll watch by the death-bed of your devil. You needn't tell me. Afterwards you would be angry with yourself. We'll walk on down to the Park. We can sit there." Her thoughts ran back to a long-dead day when this young man's mother had watched by the

death-bed of her devil. It was as though she were paying back the dead. A common woman would have chosen the moment to glut her vanity. Men play into women's hands. She thought of some of the sentimental by-paths trodden by emotional liars. There is a passivity about the female liar. It stamps her spiritual corpse. Mary Drummond wondered whether he would catch from her hint of the death-bed that reverence for all human nearness which may make talk a sacrament.

They sat on a bench, facing towards the curve of the road. Lovers passed them. Under the gleam of the lamp, the dresses in passing cabs gleamed. It was warm for the time of year. For five minutes they sat in silence.

"People were sometimes harsh to you?" he said.

"Only Nature is harsh. Death and birth are harsh. Love is harsh. People are kind really, only those three things come in."

"The last is the bad one. It gives wrong values."

"It is like moonlight."

"You would not end it, if you were re-making the world?"

"It is only fever. It gives more pain than fever. It is not a good state. But thirty years give one other kinds of truth. Sometimes I am humbled by the amount of wisdom that even a short life teaches."

"Wisdom is worth while."

"It is the food which the ant-like days lay up for the winter."

"You suffered a great deal?"

"Your mother sat by me, once, as I sit by you."

"Where was that?"

"By the sea, in Ireland. A field near the sea. The thought that the field is still there, growing its flowers while the tide clucks in the rocks, has made me ashamed,

often, since then. I soured a golden afternoon for your mother, and all that beauty was coming out of the earth."

"I wonder if I know the place."

"We haunt the places where we have felt intensely."

"I shall haunt this seat. Do I dim an evening for you?"

"No. It is my chance to pay. Your mother was very gentle with me."

"What did she say to you?" he asked.

"That there must be a big rhythm in life. It is true. The world is a big thing. It has a big purpose. It makes a sweep round the sun, giving things their chance of growth. It has its little deflections. The moon pulls the tides. But it goes on. We can go on just as calmly, just as grandly, giving things a chance to grow. The tides and the deflections ought to be only incidents. How well I remember your mother. She wore a great straw hat tied on with a scarf. You remind me of her sometimes. I have been thinking how proud she would be to see the chances of growth you give these boys. That is the only art permissible in these times, to shame those who rank the affairs of life above life. I have heard people say that they did not believe in the existence of 'mute inglorious Miltons,' as though exceptional talent had always an exceptional genius for life. Half the talent in the world is smothered by convention. Three-quarters of the rest never gets the impulse to life. Man is earth. Earth can be cultivated. And here is all this earth of man lying fallow. What crops it might grow. Revolution is the spade in the buried city. Unsuspected plants spring up. I have thought of you so often. You seem to me like a Schliemann about to turn up a civilisation from under the earth. Many women, talking as we are talking, would try to get their hands into your life, for

vulgar ends. You will know that. I am looking at your power to help the world. I see that this is a crisis for you. I have been placed beside you during the crisis. I want to be a help in the widest sense. To keep your power to help from being withered. Nature has her winter, too. It only kills her sentimentalists. The people whose thoughts and emotions lack vitality. A danger in life is to mistake a deflection for a part of the big rhythm. Tidal and magnetic things. All the emotional folly which uneducated people set above wisdom. The resolute act counts for more than those It triumphs over them."

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "But a whim can play sad tricks with a resolve."

"That is why she urged the big rhythm."

"Women make the big rhythm impossible. They hate the big rhythm. They want man to bite at their apples. Paradise can take care of itself for them."

"Few men complain till middle-age," she said.

"A great deal of folly that there may be more fools," he answered.

"There is a wise world in a wise head. Live in that world if this becomes intolerable. A fool is real. You would run to save a fool from a burning house. And a fool is better than a brute."

"It is one of the problems. Brutes justify themselves by killing fools. They are the A of civilisation. Fools are the Z. We talk of the conquest of Nature. We don't conquer her. We make her look silly. Brutes conquer Nature when they sail a ship or plough up a forest.

She was gentle with him. But some of the rooms of hell are for single souls. His tragedy was the tragedy of youth, which Time either ends or changes to comedy. He had married rashly: the world was unkind to him. All that she could give was a grave gentleness. It was

like holding wild flowers to a drowning man. He clutched them, speechless. She hoped that he would look at them when he got ashore. She felt very tender towards him. He was always the little child who had stood in the sun with her. Suggestions of his mother in look and manner strengthened her tenderness.

"Mrs. Drummond," he said. "Were you ever beaten? Beaten right down?"

"Yes. That comes to everybody. Life is full of lost battles. Women aren't exempt. Their battles go on within bitten lips."

"Life hits."

"There would be few sparks struck, otherwise."

"Some day you will tell me of your battles."

"Women's battles are best described by third persons."

"I know. I wondered where you got the strength."

"Faith in life is the only strength. Life is a flickering on the brain. It will flicker out so soon. To let emotional storms obscure the flicker. Something is trying to shine through."

"Science is a perception of the flickering."

"Art shuts it in a lantern and tries to read by it."

"I remember a saint in India. He sat by the roadside, holding out a begging-bowl. But one only saw his eyes. He had fire burning in him. Life is more than that, though. Sitting in the dust while the world rolls round."

"Rest is a part of it. Don't you shudder at the want of rest? We are mirrors. God is always trying to see his image in us. We are never still enough to give him more than a blur. I am ashamed of my leisure when I see the crowd in the street, knowing nothing more in life than daily interests."

"What is to come after that crowd? What are they going to believe? What are they going to work at?"

"They'll play the cards we deal them." Big Ben struck seven. The notes drove trembling, slowly, one by one, into their minds, a drone of a tone trembling.

"They'll tear up the pack, because we have been afraid to deal," he said. "If I'd gone on, I'd have had five million men in earnest within five years. We're a fine race with a genius for rotten institutions."

"You ought to go abroad for three months. 'Wander among unknown men.' Berlin. Or Boston."

"Yes. I know," he sighed. "I wouldn't find a person like you there. 'Nor, England, would I know till then.' But I'd like England to be a happy land. It's not too much to ask from life."

"Be happy yourself, first."

"Ah. I'm too young to be happy."

"Let us walk," she said. They walked to and fro under the lamps for a few minutes.

"I've not talked surrender," he said.

"No, of course you haven't. There's the Brigade to save. You must illustrate my theory, that our officials are much better than our administrators."

"Yes. We're wonderful on the low plane. We do a day's work." The bitterness flamed out again. "That's my quarrel," he said. "Where is the chance for the day's work? We break half the hearts in the country that the other half may get fatty degeneration." They walked under the trees, towards the park gates.

"When you go home," she said, "will you tell your wife to expect me at any time? The battle begins."

"I'll tell her." They walked to the street. She was thinking that any living soul would have served his turn as well.

"There are no heroes," he said. "Life is an opportunity for Reason. Tempered by luck. The colour of a life depends on the kind of people near it at critical times. The Church dimly recognises that, even now."

"We have all the machinery for perfect life."

"I know. But it's all designed for hand-power."

"That is the only power. That is why I care for your Brigade."

They stopped to say good-bye. She searched his face, catching again that suggestion of the long dead day from his likeness to his mother. Weariness (like the extremes of age) often brings out a likeness. It brings out the woman in a man's face, in his nature, too, perhaps. A drunken, grey-haired woman came past, dancing, snapping her fingers, nodding her head. A little crowd followed, encouraging her, annoying her. Lionel drew his breath sharply, with an "O God." Mrs. Drummond liked him for it.

"We'll bring beauty even into that," she said.

"I don't blame her," he said. "The grave's waiting. It's the only protest they ever make."

"You want watering and potting out," she said. He smiled. Feminine wit had always a relish for him.

"What do you do with weeds?" he asked.

"You will see," she said. "Even if we don't bring beauty, there'll be beauty in the effort. Beauty is effort. It is a hard thing. It hurts to make. Aren't you trying for a sterile world?" He sighed. "That is the result of detachment." They shook hands warmly, without speaking. She feared to rouse the emotional devil in him. He felt that if he spoke he might be sentimental. They turned from each other. She entered a station, he hailed a motor cab. As he was driven home, he wondered what the end would be. She was always an optimist. Women usually are. But optimism is physiologic, not philosophic. He smiled. The pessimist? A sentimentalist in mourning. He sighed heavily. There would be another scene with Rhoda. What would be the end of that? But there is no end to marriage. Marriage is for life. He had

vowed to endure it till he or she lay dead. Dimly, as a man will at times, he saw Rhoda white on the bed. He saw himself kneeling at the bedside, in an agony of remorse. "O Rhoda. Rhoda. It would be different if you were back." The nature does not change in that way. Marriage is the effort of two temperaments to adjust themselves. One may have the best will in the world. A disinclination in the other may turn the good will to frenzy.

Inside the door of the flat was a shelf on which letters were left. He looked through the letters. There was one from Naldrett, one from Captain Peters, one from Mrs. Richard Homme. Under them was a note from Rhoda for him. He tore it open, divining evil. It was short.

DEAR LIONEL,—I am going to stay with Dora. You can suit yourself about coming down for the week-end. Naturally I cannot ask you to stay with Dora. If you want to come, there are rooms at the Borman Arms; you can write and engage them. But of course you do not like the country in the winter! I have turned your evening things out of my cupboard. I do not like the smell of tobacco in my clothes. Dear Lion, don't be vexed. You have quite spoiled my blue muslin. It is quite ruined.—With love, R.H.

He walked into the sitting-room. A telegram lay on the floor. He picked it up. It was for Rhoda from Dora. "Delighted have you. Can only manage one. Dora." It had been handed in at Pudsey at half-past three. Time to catch the 4.45. A servant entered.

"Will you be wanting dinner, sir?"

"Yes," he said. Dinner was announced in time. He paid no heed to the announcement. Long afterwards, the servant, coming back to tell him that the soup

was cold, found him in an armchair, staring straight ahead of him.

"Your soup will be quite cold, Mr. Heseltine."

"What?" he said.

"Your soup will be quite cold, sir."

"I must change," he said. He rose to his feet. He wanted the refreshment of changing. But when he had begun to undress he could not find his clothes. He searched in all the drawers. They were not there. Where the devil were they; then? The servants had not seen them. At last after long searching, Susan brought him some very crumpled clothes.

"Are these the ones, sir?"

"Those are they. Where were they?"

"Under some rubbish in the fireplace, sir, in Mrs. Heseltine's room."

"Who put them there?" he flamed.

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps Jane'll know." Jane, being asked, declared that she saw the mistress put them there.

"She must have put them there by mistake," Jane said. "It was when we were turning out the cupboards to get her things."

He stood in his shirt-sleeves at the door of his dressing-room, turning over the crumpled coat.

"I must stretch them," he said. "Bring dinner." After the servants had gone, he felt along the coat's shoulder. It had been crushed. He had a glimpse of Rhoda in a nervous fury wreaking on the coat something of what she felt towards the wearer.

CHAPTER XI

HE received no letter from Rhoda. He wrote a short note to her. A few days later he talked with Sir William Fount about the taking over of the Brigade. He fought for a definite answer from Sir William, but got none. The Baronet was polite, interested, evasive. Coming away from the interview, Lionel decided that Sir William was holding out upon the strength of secret information. "What is the next blow?" he wondered. "What more can they be plotting?" Sir William had a great head and little pale brown pig's eyes. Lionel liked him. He discovered in him a curious knowledge of the motions of waves. What could he know of the affairs of the Brigade, or of the plans of the Associated? The business world is a world at war, though its fighters are crueller, and less manly than soldiers. As in war, information leaks out, or is deduced from signs, often from small signs. Minds narrowed beyond a certain point are always in focus. "Something is going to happen," he said to himself. Wondering what it would be, he found himself thinking of Sir William. "He can improvise and organise," he thought. "He can learn anything, and do most things. But he can't think." He wondered how much an instinctive ability would gain by having that added power. Sir William was the son of a small farmer. The wives of the gentry near his native village, in Herefordshire, found pleasure in the memory. Intellect is the dangerous thing which God permits. God vouchsafes His view of it to sinners by never allowing it a grandfather.

The strike of the United continued. Their campaign

in the Press prospered. The sales of the *Snip Snap* Press fell away. "It is like a boycott," Lionel said. The Daily Press gave him the name of Blackleg. Little gangs of bullies, made up of London's loose rascaldom, threatened the Brigade Boys. To speak to a Brigade Boy was to win foul abuse from half a dozen of the scum of the world. To offer to buy a paper from him was to court assault. No man loved *Snip Snap* even unto martyrdom. The clerk glanced at the dangers which hedged the purchase. Siding with the majority, he slunk away, to where the opposition offered the ass in him sweet pasture.

Mrs. Drummond called upon Rhoda.

"She's away," said Lionel. "She's down in the country."

"Will she be long away?" Lionel had not heard. He said that she would be there for some time longer. He had not written. Sometimes he was prompted to write. But then came in the memory of the crumpled coat. That was hard to forgive. A small vindictiveness rankles. A big sin calls out something big in the forgiver of it. Her letter rankled. Neither man nor woman can forgive a rudeness from one of the opposite sex. A man's rudeness to a man is personal, it rouses wrath against a person. A woman's rudeness to a man is sexual, it rouses wrath against the sex. He made allowance for her nerves. He had seen all the strings of that lute tense to snapping. She rankled, though. His bitterness painted him the picture of the two women together, by the fireside, talking. She would be giving her version. An angry woman's version. By inference from many facts Mary Drummond caught a glimpse of the picture.

She had been trying to catch Sir Pica Galley, she said. But Sir Pica was at Cuenca, or on his way home on mule-back, through Spain. Lady Galley, whom she had

seen, was interested. She quoted Lady Galley. "Sir Pica used to be interested in his business, but latterly, my dear, he's beginning to see the results of business on the nation."

"Even if Sir Pica should fail us, there is Sir William Fount."

"I've seen Sir William," Lionel said. "Something is being planned."

"For us?"

"No. Against."

"What?"

"I don't know. There it is. When will Sir Pica be back?"

"A fortnight."

"I am giving the boys notice this week. The strike's ruined my last venture. Nothing's coming in. It must end while I can end without debt."

"A week's notice?"

"A fortnight's. Three weeks if I can mortgage."

"My poor friend. How are the boys?"

"I wish I were like them. The English have virtue."

"You look worn out with brooding on them."

"Oh. It's a worry. Life often is, even at its best. I don't think I'll start again."

"You won't give up? You mustn't talk like that. Here's this wonderful world that you're going to make beautiful. One of the few people who can." He shook his head wearily. The epigram was not spoken. Her words made him too sad to be cynical.

"I wish I'd your mind," he said. "You pray?"

"Yes."

"Is it more than getting excited about the work in hand?"

"Yes. More than that. It certifies the fitness of the work, and the rightness of the means. And it consecrates the worker." They talked for an hour or more,

two hours. They sat by firelight in his study. Towards the end of the time he was cheered by the sight of flowers among the stones of his mind. She had put them there. He thought them his own.

"I wouldn't do any work if I could always talk," he said. "Talking with a delightful person with whom one can't agree. . . . It's like dawn prolonged indefinitely. A glimmer, and greenery, and always cool dew."

"It is the wave saying to the rock, 'I cannot drown you. At least I will put a sparkle on your seaweeds.'"

"I wish we talkers had more time. We sit, we tune ourselves; the notes strike. Perhaps the notes wander abroad and strike hearts keyed to them. We sow music; ideas. The worst is, that when talk is good, life has flowered. The barbarian's on the march. People suffer hell for centuries, and at the end two fine people sit by teacups for an hour, talking like hypodermic syringes."

"That is the end. One end. Another end is when two fine people conquer the barbarian. Ancient barbarism was beyond the borders. Now it's within. And Nature wants barbarism." She rose to go. "But I'm not going to leave you thinking that. Sir Pica's coming."

"Death-bed repentance," said Lionel. "Perhaps that's what we're all suffering from. I wonder how much virtue that man has destroyed." They parted at the door. "Good-bye, dear woman." She held his hand. Her eyes were steadfast. "We must make the most of all good impulse," she said.

"Ideal's only a glimmer at the best. May Sir Pica be a foundation for us."

"If I could get to Sir Pica. But I'm tied."

"Your wife?"

"Partly," he said indifferently. "Oh, the business.

And the strike. Everything. Let me see you again soon. You 'consecrate the worker.' "

"Consecration is a big word. It is apt to lose its meaning."

"Work is meaningless without it."

"Wicked, rather. Good-bye."

There are many contemptible women who use a man's want of help as a spoon to stir their own sensuality. Other sweet sentimental souls stand forever on tip-toe, asking for "a friend." Those who have failed in marriage are players at this game.

Lionel had often wondered why rational souls should behave thus. He concluded that they do so only when the woman's cowardly regard for her own convenience meets with an answering half-heartedness in the man. Half-heartedness is the one sin in life. It destroys life, and makes man supremely foolish in the process. Lionel was merciless to the half-hearted. He had been its accomplice. He had been its dupe. Rhoda's nerves, her shrinkings, the delicacies which he had thought so fine, the wiles which he had found so sweet, were part of that calling out for death which brings the barbarian. In praising her he had praised the fear of life. He had put his soul in petticoats and dabbed it with a powder-puff.

He thanked God for Mary Drummond. The genuine woman after the merely feminine is like rock after marsh. He had once felt a want in her. Now he paid her the tribute of half admitting that the want had been in himself. He had asked for a superficial charm, for the will-o'-the-wisp which flickers over the sensual. Mary was a fine strong spirit. She was a steady star. He could trust to her burning clear above any of the storms of life.

Could he? He was getting wise about women. Could he be sure? Could he be sure that she was

not like the others, a sentimentalist disguised? Her interest might be an astute flattery, designed to draw a warmer return of the same. He knew to what subtleties of falsehood the female sentimentalist will stoop. He knew with what hypocrisy the false woman will cover her approach. Women hoodwink men by an assumption of interests. They can assume interests in literature, in the cause of liberty, in "life." Modern social intercourse rests upon assumption. Women have but to make an assumption. The wavering flame of sex adroitly wielded guards them from the thrusts of criticism. They bait their trap with an assumed interest, sure of the spring, certain of the victim's folly.

But their power has limits, even if their victim's folly has none. Interests may be assumed, states of the soul cannot. Nobleness of mind cannot be assumed. Man should seek for that when he goes marrying, some perception of the soul of the world, a passion for the right, a faith which burns steady, not only when "life" is "good," but when life is bad. Death is the touchstone. Touch a character (even in imagination) with death, the death of some one dear. To what colour does it turn? To what does it change? Mary Drummond stood the test.

Thought of Mary Drummond cheered him that evening as he sat alone over the fire. Intellect and sex are old enemies. The thought of children choked him. The childless suffer a starvation of the soul. He felt like an empty grate. She had been through it, too, he supposed. She had no child. He thought of the dread of having children, as the mark of the sensual nature, in woman or man. She must have pined for a child. Had she ever borne a child? Or had she always starved? He knew of a childless woman. He had come upon her suddenly, hugging a friend's child to her breast, weeping as though her heart would break. Pity for all starved

women took him. It was partly pity for himself. Mary was his friend. That was going to be a bright and fine thing. No rotten mist of sex should rise to fog that. Thought of the Brigade stabbed him in the back. He rose, wincing, to walk up and down, up and down, dreeing a bitter weird. The Brigade was coming to an end. The Brigade was coming to an end. He was going to be a ruined man. He would be trampled on, spat on, laughed at, mocked. On the night of his ruin, Rhoda, lover of success, would peer in upon him with her smile of contempt. What happens to such women? They prosper. They kill the life in the womb. They kill the life in the heart, yet they prosper. Selfishness usually prospers. Any tickling of the world's sensuality wins it forgiveness. In the bitterness of his wrath with Rhoda he wished himself dead. If he was not dying, at least his work was coming to an end. There is peace at the end of things, or, if not peace, emptiness. Life would be blank, perhaps, when all this coil was cut. It would, at least, be free from fever. Free from *Snip Snap*, he could see himself free to live. Modern man, caught in a whirlpool, calls being sucked down living. Lionel in the burst of breakers saw still water ahead. He saw himself free to write, to study, to talk. The calm, earnest face of Mrs. Drummond was very steadfast among the turmoil. Perhaps at the sunset of earth's last day the evening star will show. Mind dying off the world will need that assurance.

CHAPTER XII

ON the tenth day, as he went to the office, he saw that the blow had fallen. On the sides of the omnibuses, in big blue letters, were the words—TIP TOP. The new Weekly. You can get it at the bookstalls. TIP TOP. In Trafalgar Square he was delayed by musicians in pale blue uniforms. They were marching in fours behind a drum-major. After the band came banner-bearers. The banners blew out bravely, he could read the legends on them.—TIP TOP. You can get it at the bookstalls. TIP TOP. Laughter greeted the legend. Men cheered. Brigade boys in the street were bidden to look at what was passing. After the banners came four young ladies in a lorry. Though they were dressed to represent England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, they more closely resembled the national intoxicants. They scattered handbills for which the crowd scrambled. One of the handbills fluttered against Lionel's chest. He read it. It repeated the legend of the banners.

With several hundreds of other people he marched beside the lorry to the Strand entrance. Here the bearers of a furled banner cast loose their gaskets. When open, the banner showed the words of a song printed in large type. Instantly, at the word of command, as the band struck up a tune, the national ladies broke into song. As they sang they scattered handbills from a tub covered with silver paper. Less lavishly they scattered copies of the new weekly. Lionel caught one copy. The words of the song slowly drew

clear of the accent, just as a ship draws clear of fog.

"I'm the *Tip Top, Tip Top, Tip Top* Touch,
That knocked old *Snip Snap* aht."

Lionel grinned at the thrust: but bitterly. So they stole his methods, and debased them. Caricature is often shrewd moral judgment. Only the good can stand parody. He felt that he was seeing his ideas under a magnifying glass. He did not like the sight. Walking swiftly, he passed the column, and reached his office door. A large crowd had gathered outside the door. The houses flanking his office supported immense blue canvas letters, announcing *Tip Top*. At the open windows, immense phonographs sang the marching song, or, pausing, shouted that you could get it at the bookstalls. It had become epigrammatic to say "*Tip Top*" to the Brigade Boys in the streets. Wits spoke the words with an air of detachment, in passing. With the same inflection the boys in seaports, passing a negro in the street, murmur, "See that coon." Between the two immense hoardings the *Snip Snap* signs showed like little hyphens. Lionel mounted the stairs. He looked down from the outer office window on to the heads of a quickly gathering crowd. The slow movement of the omnibuses reminded him of a day in India. Elephants had forged through a crowd with just that motion. The crowd below opened upon him. "Yah! *Snip Snap*." "Wot O the bookstalls." One wag greeted him, "Keptin Coe." Lionel stood for a minute, watching them. They roared aloud when they heard the band. The banners came straining, the heads of the singing ladies showed, the tub gleamed. The omnibuses stopped as the crowd surged across the street to watch. Their passengers stood up; there was a cheering. Five hundred people, marching to the band,

were singing that they were the *Tip Top* Touch. " 'Ooray. *Tip Top*." " Boo! *Snip Snap*." " Gow owm." A young man full of the catch-word wit of the streets, began to sing:—

" If you want to know the noos
Ask a bookstall,
Want the . . . noos."

The drums and trumpets loosened the strain of improvisation. The national ladies flung more handbills. The wind fluttered the papers over the heads of the crowd. The snatching hands reminded Lionel of one of the sights of war time. Not all the crowd could get near the lorry. Many of the idlers turned again to listen to the phonographs. They made remarks about *Snip Snap*. Lionel looked down upon them. That was the English crowd, his audience.

He did not like the looks of them. Idlers of any kind were out of his scheme of the world. City idlers were poison to him. " You're a rotten lot," he muttered. " You're the barbarism which will end this Rome. You can't work. You can't play. You can't think. You won't learn and you won't be drilled. You stand and boo. You boo the women who want votes, and the soldiers who want men, and the truth-teller and the losing side. And other men's labour and wisdom keep you going." There was nothing in the faces. " I saw you happy on Mafeking Night," he muttered. " You degraded us in the eyes of the world. Some night you'll be angry. You'll need a strong bit when that happens. Hunger's the bit for you."

Miss Coleman recalled him to himself. There were other matters, serious matters. He forced his roving attention to them, wondering " for how much longer? " Things were coming to an end. Proofs of the last issue of *Snip Snap* were handed to him. He looked through

the make-up, sighing. Nothing had come from Sir Pica. Sir William Fount came in, during the morning. He saw that he had heard rumours. He wished to know if there were any truth. Lionel chaffed him about the poverty of his invention. Cavour and Bismarck enjoyed a chat together.

After he had gone, Lionel made addition sums upon his blotting paper. The phonograph rang in his head. It was as though bulls with cockney voices were shouting like Americans. He recognised the method of Mr. Ike:—

“Ow, there yn’t no daht abaht it,
That you kennot live withaht it.
Fer it’s *Tip Top*,
All the time.
Tip Top.”

Hearing that, once in every three minutes, from half past nine till six, disposed him to dispense with proof.

The day passed slowly. He had once met a man who argued that the eternity of the parsons was the five minutes between death and re-birth. He forgot the argument. It ran somehow thus. “Time is a fiction of the body. When you are dead, you are out of that part of you subject to time. Outside the body there is eternity, etc., etc.” Lionel thought of it now. Bodily weariness brings into the mind all that is muddy and mechanical. Modern art is the solace of the tired clever. Modern religion is the solace of the tired stupid. Art and faith should be youths with flaming hair riding on singing stars. His day passed in multitudinous mental processions from muddy memory to image, then back. All the time he had his work to do. There were letters, callers, orders. The phonographs entered the brain. He was possessed by devils. There is no greater devil than the machine unduly exalted. The crowd

without sniggered or booed. The phonographs sang on. Their song was the soul of the crowd speaking. "American art," said Lionel, "the American mind. The temporary in 'Settle's numbers.'" At five o'clock he found Miss Coleman in tears. She confessed, between sobs, that she was crying because "it was all stolen from him." He read her excuse to mean that her sorrow was for him, that she felt how bitterly this was hurting. He joked with her. "We ought to feel flattered." He asked her how her drawing did. Her mood gave a gloomy tinge to things. She hadn't the heart to go on with her Italian. He remembered a soldier's account of a British defeat. There had been incompetent strategy, politician's strategy, helped by incompetent tactics. There had been splendid heroism, self-sacrifice, manliness. The men straggled back to camp crying, or mad, or sullen. They came slowly, under heavy fire. Some of them sat down crying, waiting to be killed. The commander, reporting, said, "They gave us a devil of a mauling." The difference in the moods was here, too. The Normans among us have never quite mixed with the Saxons. They have only learned to build worse.

At half-past six he left the office. The crowd was thicker now. The workers had begun to join the idlers. In the roar of the Strand at its busiest hours he heard nothing but Mr. Ike singing through his nose. The tune was on the barrel organs. Announcements of it were hung outside the music-halls. In Regent Street a band marched past playing it. It was not the band of the morning.

He talked to half a dozen of the Brigade boys. They had had a bad day. They had not been mobbed, only hustled and chaffed. The crowd had learned a new catchword, two new catchwords. "A bit of all right, the wy their bends march." It was. Lionel had

noticed. The bands of the opposition marched like theatre supers at the end of Julius Cæsar.

He was saddened by the talk with the boys. He could not bear to think of the day when he would disband them. They were under sentence. Dismissal drew nearer every hour. In his weaker moments he made wild plans to save them. But his mind was too hard for self-deception. They could not be saved. No man can fight the machine. The machine rolls on. It can be diverted, it can be washed, it may be mended. It cannot be stopped, nor checked. He who gets outside the machine must get well out, if he wish to escape crushing. Sir Pica had sent no answer. Lionel had ceased to expect one; he knew Sir Pica's brain. "There is any quantity of boy labour. It is unorganised. It is thoughtless. It has neither power nor wish for power. I can use this labour to distribute my wares, at such cost as I think fit. The work will destroy the boys. It will unfit them for life. After I have used them, no one will be able to use them. That is the State's affair. My business is to distribute papers cheaply."

Lionel sighed. "In spite of all the gods and prophets, this." Sparta cared more for her youth than that. Specimens of Sir Pica's handiwork loafed at a gin house doorway. They held sporting papers; the evening editions, full of football news. Three youths of eighteen, who had never worked and never would work, hung together, peering, with ophthalmic eyes, at the latest telegrams. All were smoking cheap cigarettes. All were in rags. People passed them. No one noticed them. No one cared. That was what Englishmen had come to, after ten centuries. Lionel thought of Rhoda. She was a delicate blossom. Life had been kind to her. Many lives had wrought to perfect her. He bit his lips when he thought of the amount of virtue squandered to fit her for an afternoon's shopping.

He had thought little of his wife since she went into the country. He could not write to her. Her letter rankled still. He could not forgive that. He saw her, exquisitely dressed, in that dim sweet devil's bit scabious blue, sitting by the fire, brooding. There is a story about a witch who looked into a pool of water. Feminine minds, poetical minds, all brooding, unprincipled minds, are like pools of water. Images form in them, sometimes so clearly that they are mistaken for thoughts. Rhoda was looking into her mind at her own image. The pool was troubled, the image was disturbed. Sometimes she might be excused for not knowing that the image at which she gazed was her own.

As he entered the flat he smelt again the perfume which always clung about her. He had once loved the perfume. Now it sickened him. The vague sweet scent reminded him of all that was guileful in woman. It was one of her lures. "So she has come back," he thought. He was irritable; he did not want the extra strain. Men want to be alone when they are worried, women ask for company. He made a good deal of noise in the hall, to warn her of his entry, but she did not come to him. He went into the sitting-room, expecting to find her by the fire, complaining of headache. She was not there. The scent made the room sickly. A sachet from her bureau lay broken on the table. The room was in confusion. Books were gone from the shelves, pictures from the walls. Two chairs, a small, gate-legged table, a pair of Lowestoft bowls, and some long silver taper sticks, as slim as lily stalks, had been taken from their places. They stood on the floor beside her bureau. Other things, books, miniatures, netsukes, tsuba, lay in a little pile under the window. All the things so separated were hers. Lying apart from the others, they gave to his sensitive mind an impression of her personality extended to her possessions. It was

as though she stood in those heaps, holding her skirts tightly to her, guarding against the contamination of contact with anything that was his. An implied judgment was evident. Her things were the sheep, his things were the goats. The little islands on the floor were eloquent of the bitterness of her shrinking. She had been there, it was her work. Where was she now? He went to her bedroom.

The stale scent from discarded sachets made him open the window; the room reeked with it. On the bed, lying face downwards on broken glass, was his portrait; a small red chalk drawing done the year before. It had hung in an old carved frame of Rhoda's. She had ripped it from its place, so that she might take her frame. The work had been done fiercely, with a chisel. The drawing had been flung down fiercely, with a "There. Take your drawing. Let me have my frame."

The room had been rifled. The drawers from the chest lay empty on the floor. She had taken everything except the things which might remind her of him. In the cupboard where her dresses used to hang was a scabious-blue gown trimmed with Irish lace. He had given it to her when she was ill. Under it were two or three hair pins, a couple of pill-boxes containing camphor, and a packet of his letters to her. They were his love-letters. He opened one of them. He read a few lines wondering what devil had possessed him. All this talk of beloved, and beauty, and exquisite sweet lovely darling. He shuddered with disgust. Life could play these tricks on people. She had suffered, too. He would not make her a victim. She was a human soul, every whit as important and as foolish as himself, in the eyes of God. The sight of the broken glass on the bed made him bitter again. What is this fever? It must have a germ, like other fevers. It runs a well-marked

feverish course, of incubation, excitement, light-headedness, followed by violent revulsion. It makes man behave like a germ in a disease. It is a disease. Writers have written of it as though it were the only good, the only happiness, the only wisdom. Writers wouldn't be writers, he thought, if they could do anything more manly. They are in a conspiracy to make the world's soul soft. He flamed.

He went into his study. The fire was burning. The grate was littered with ashes and half-burnt papers. A blackened, fire-twisted silver photograph-frame stuck from between the bars. "Her photograph," he muttered. The letters were her love-letters. Papers from his desk were scattered everywhere. She had rummaged through his belongings in her thirst for vengeance upon the dead self of her who had accepted him. Things which she had given him were stamped in the wastepaper basket. He looked at them in a queer mood between tears and blasphemy. "Nervous fury," he muttered, savagely. The next moment he found himself pitying her, understanding her. It was so like her. She was always a shy, retiring creature. Her mood now was her normal mood maddened. Her fury was a fury of purification. In his own self-condemnation he treated her image with much such bitterness. Both had been betrayed by life. In different ways they loathed the evidence of the betrayal. The fire flared up swiftly at the photograph. It lit a roll of paper that lay, not yet burnt, among the litter in the grate. It was the manuscript of his "Theory of Life." Rage rose up in him at the sight of it. He beat out the flames with the tongs, knocking off flakes of paper from the outer sheets. "Theory of life," he thought. "Man's theory of life, before he meets woman, is generally rewritten later." He left the study. In the dining-room

a maid was laying the table for dinner. She looked at him strangely. She was puzzled.

"Mrs. Heseltine left a letter for you, sir," she said.

"Yes?" he said. "What time did she get here?"

"About eleven, sir." She handed him a letter. He thanked her. He put it into his pocket. Dinner was almost ready, the maid assured him. He loitered in the dining-room, reading an evening paper. Presently he went to dress.

In his dressing-room, he opened the letter, and read it through, sitting on his little cot bed:—

PUDSEY.

DEAR LIONEL,—You will agree with me that our marriage hasn't been a success. It is idle to pretend that we can live together. I do not care to go into the rights and wrongs again. That would only be more humiliation for me. I was willing to consult your convenience before mine; but men seem incapable of appreciating a woman's point of view. Dollisons will come for my things to-morrow; kindly let them have them. I hope your work is going well. It is a pity that you cannot, for all your cleverness—that you cannot learn that there are more beautiful things in life for a woman than the life you offered me. But thank you. I know quite well that you meant kindly. Only I am not the sort of woman to accept a low valuation from the man with whom I choose to live. It is a small matter, and it is over now, but something you said to me. We won't go into it all again. Even if I wrote it you wouldn't understand. I feel hot all over when I think of it.

For the present I shall stay with Dora. The country will soon be looking lovely. We are leaving the cottage. I hope you will have the good sense to see that since the gods have denied certain things it will not be the slightest good your coming to see me. I bear you no

malice, though you have wrecked my life. But I do not wish to be reminded of that fact more than is necessary. Some day, perhaps. At present I wish to forget. I hear from people here that your great scheme is collapsing. You will be disappointed, as you were very keen about it, but I daresay your clever friends will see more of you when it is all over. I am much better here. The air suits me. I have not been very light of heart, as you may imagine; but there are delightful people coming here, and I "see the dawn glow through!" Dora, who wishes to be remembered to you, asks you to send back her copy of *La Rafale* if you have done with it.—Yours sincerely,
R.H.

The letter stunned his mind. After reading it, he felt as though a heavy blow had fallen within him. After the numbness came acute pain. His nature cried out for her. He saw her with savage intensity. He realised what she was. She was blindingly clear in his mind, her ways, her beauty, her tenderness. Every memory of her burned him. Every memory rankled with reproach. She was gone, he had lost her. It was as though she had died. The letter made all the difference. He wanted her back. If she would come back. She could not mean to go out of his life. She was so beautiful, so delicate, so dainty. Her philosophy was a finer thing than his. He had been to blame. He had made no allowances. "Rhoda. Rhoda. Come back to me here."

He read the letter through again, as he sat at table, mechanically swallowing food. The food was like coke in his throat, yet the act of eating changed his mood. His mind seemed to be full of rolls of smoke. The smoke of a mood surged up, swallowing other moods; then it volleyed out, and hurried, and backed, chased by other moods till all the moods of man were at battle in him.

Out of the welter, a mood of disgust rolled, covering the agony by clouding his vanity. He had been set aside, rejected, cast off. That hurt. Who was she, with her gossamer arts, to judge him? Vanity is unforgiving. Wounds to honour may be wiped out, injuries to the soul may be forgiven, a prick to the vanity festers till death. Pity for himself (the only known antidote to wounded vanity, though few can stand enough of it to effect a cure) obscured the wound for a moment. He had this to fight against, this, besides his other troubles. Life was not much fun, he thought. To be struck like this, and tossed to one side, when the brain was already reeling in him. Among the bitternesses, that of being judged by a woman was one of the most cruel. She could not have timed her blow more shrewdly.

In the blur of his mind he felt a personality stepping clear of the swathes of mood. He felt himself saying, "I must think of my work. I shall have to do a lot more work. Work will kill any grief." A pang of self-pity made him make the feeling remark that "the deed which lessens a creature's faith in life is the sinful deed." "Sin itself is little compared with its results." He went from his feast of ashes to the sitting-room, where the collection of Rhoda's things seemed to him like Rhoda defiant, daring him to touch her. There was something deadly in their separation; they bristled, they showed teeth.

He read through the letter for the third time, before he put it into the fire. It flared up, burnt to black, and whisked away lightly up the chimney. "So things come to an end," he thought. "And how am I to face life with Rhoda gone and the work ruined?" In a couple of weeks the work would be over. His heart and mind would be empty pockets. "What can I do? What shall I do?" he thought.

He could go back to the old life. There is always

famine in India. There is Kala-azar. There is beri-beri. He had read of a parasite in green coffee. He could qualify. Pictures of the desolation of exile rose in his mind. He saw the camp, the desert, the grinning skull of a moon laughing over the death of the earth.

That again, after Rhoda.

He saw the ward at night full of fever patients. He felt the heat, making the air palpable, day a curse, night, hell. He heard the mosquitoes pinging past. He repeated a scrap of song, made Heaven knows by whom, by some sufferer, perhaps, in the days of the Company, to solace other sufferers:—

“ I get no rest at night,
The damned mosquitoes bite,
Around me droning,
As I lie moaning.”

How could he go back to that, after Rhoda, after the life in town? He could never face that womanless life again. He had known a home. How could he face exile again? It would be bitterness unbearable. It would be death, the torment after death. What other thing could he do?

He could go away, he told himself. There were places to see, historical places, ground to go over. He might get military employment somewhere, or take to writing military history. British military history is mostly a bloody comment on our administration. Most of our wars spring from the terrors of our politicians. To set that down, so that men might know the spots on England's fame, and resolve to add no more, seemed a fair resolve. He thought of campaigns. The French in Ireland. He could go over the ground from both sides, acting, now the French commander, now the English. Longing to get further away turned his mind westward. He could go over the Wilderness

Campaign. He roused himself from his misery at the thought. "The South was fine," he muttered. "The South was fine." He fell to unprofitable musings on the luck of war. If Johnston had lived an hour more at Shiloh. If Stuart had been with Lee at Gettysburg. If Jackson had not ridden to the front after Chancellorsville. If the horse could have gone on after First Manassas. If Jackson had come after McLellan. If Malvern Hill had been seized. He served himself a variety of dainty military dishes. "Lord," he muttered. "The fine are beaten every time. Nature is against the fine." He was being beaten.

He felt very lonely. Pity for himself made him tender to the world; but the tenderness soon passed. "Perhaps," he muttered. "Perhaps life is only a sport. We may be doing all this folly because some joltering silly sun got loose in Heaven. We're civilised. But we're afraid of life, and we're old at fifty." Images of happier men came into his mind; Arabs at the reed play, Scots at the ford, after a raid. Indians rounding up horses. Other images came to him. They floated into his brain from nowhere. Memories came back. They were so clear that they hurt. "It must be agony to remember when one is dying," he said. A sea full of mystery glimmered in his mind; it was the colour of dark slate. It was an Irish sea. His mother must have looked upon it many times. The sea, with a far-away island, the sea-beach broken by a brook. He had not seen the place for years. Near the shore of the sea there grew the devil's bit scabious. All his thoughts came home in the end to Rhoda. Very keenly, like a slowly entering spear, the thought of what might have been came to him. They might have been sitting hand in hand by the fire, talking of a new life coming to them, a life which they would shape, avoiding what had marred themselves. In a few years

. . . He had always been gentle to the idea of children. Thinking of the children denied to him made the blow harder. "Women must ache all through," he thought. "The want of a child must eat them up from within." He turned down that page, with a glimpse of his son diving naked from a rock, a clean deep dive, disciplined swiftness. He felt again as he had felt before at the burials of relatives, that the House of Heseltine brooded about him, wherever he went. All the Heseltines "who lived and died lang syne" seemed gathered in the room, invisibly, but sensibly, watching their last descendant. Pity for the dead who have never lived rose up in him. Uncles who had loitered through life, hunting, shooting, as though time itself were a thing to be killed, aunts who had done poker-work and regretted the intemperance of the poor; the brother killed in the war; the little girl sister whom he had never seen. They were all there. They were pathetic, they cut the heart. His mother, a grave figure, was there, his father, all the long generations, ten generations, with shadowy Scots beyond, all there, all watching, interested, dispassionate, they would only sigh whatever happened. "Death must be that," he thought. "A dispassionate looking on at the results, with a quickening of interest when the end comes." He sat silent for a while. "If I'm not to succeed, it seems too trivial," he said aloud. The world was in a tangle. Tangles are sometimes interesting: it is pleasant to unravel them. But why should he go on with the unravelling of this tangle? What would be his reward? Who would care? No son would inherit, no wife would share it. Besides, the thing was at an end. The time was unripe, or the measures were unwise; it did not matter which. "I'm not going on with it," he said.

Having said that he felt more at ease. Even a wrong decision is pleasant after doubt. "How one is tricked

out of death," he thought. "We are tricked into keeping alive. Youth doesn't know. Youth has its toys, the senses. One keeps alive, thinking they will last. Children drag one on another stage. When they leave home one has work of some sort, or the prospect of retirement from work. So we go on, till the ills of old age get hold of us. It's a losing game and a stupid game." He unlocked a drawer and took out his revolver-case. As he laid it on the table he wondered if it were fair to Rhoda. His brain was very clear, but he saw all his thoughts as pictures. He found it hard to put them into words. Could Rhoda care for some other man? He had heard rumours. People had hinted. Well, she should be free. If she loved another man she should be free to go to him. He unlocked the case and took out the revolver.

He had not looked at the weapon since he left Africa, eighteen months before. It was rusty. The catch had jammed. The chambers were so stiff that they would not revolve. The cartridges littered in the case were foul. "Oil and a feather," he muttered. "Where can I get a bit of rag?"

A piece of gauze lay on the floor. It was a piece from one of Rhoda's blue veils. He picked it up. "This'll do," he said. He began to wipe the cartridges. He had wiped a dozen or more before he remembered that he would only need one. For a long time after that, he sat staring into the fire, with the revolver on his knees.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed for nine. The noise of the notes roused him. He picked up the weapon, pointed it from him and pressed the trigger to cock it. The trigger was stiff with rust. "The thing won't cock," he muttered. The damp of West Africa had fouled the mechanism. "Pull, you swine," he said irritably. He crooked his finger hard, three or four times, against the trigger. At the last pressure

the thing gave; there followed a flash-shock-bang. Coals leaped from the grate; the broken register rattled into the fireplace. Scraps struck the window. Lionel dropped the revolver. It struck his foot and fell on the hearthrug. "What the devil," he said, shaking. "Good Lord, that startled me." Soot fell blazing into the fireplace. A servant entered, holding the door wide.

"Mrs. Drummond, sir," she said. Mrs. Drummond walked swiftly into a room full of the stink of powder. A draught made by the opening of the door beat smoke from the soot.

"You're not shot?" she said. "What is it?" He looked at her stupidly. The revolver lay on the floor. In the middle of the hearthrug a bit of coal burnt cheerfully with a resolute butterfly of flame. The door closed. The noise of the shutting of the door seemed to shut something in his skull.

"What is it?" she asked again. She was very white; her eyes searched his. The room was sudden with horror. Moments in dreams are like that. His guilty face, the room, the coal on the rug. She trod out the burning. Still her eyes made questions. The room was tense. Something had been killed in it, a will, a purpose.

"What were you doing?" she said, "what were you doing?"

"The gun went off," he said.

"I thought," she said, doubting. "I thought." She stopped. She took him by the arm, gazing at him, her face all drawn. "Were you going to kill yourself?" He shook his head, in his sullen way. He broke into a silly laughter. "I was never so frightened in my life," he said. The laughter was like shuddering. She soothed him. She pressed him back into his chair, murmuring, talking, giving him no chance to talk.

"I couldn't come before," she said. "I've been in

Spain. I've been seeing Sir Pica. He's going to take on the Brigade."

"Sir Pica?"

"I've seen him. Here are the papers." He stared at her till the meaning of her words had reached him. They sat for long minutes staring into each other's eyes.

"You must let me do this with you," she said, at last, speaking hurriedly. "I've been acting for you. I've been taking your name in vain. He wants us to go to him on Sunday morning. He's going to enlarge the Brigade, and use it all over England to distribute his papers. He controls fifty-seven papers. He's a very wonderful man. He is a sort of man I've prayed for. A man, with a will and intellect like that, who has learned that he has a duty to mankind. He is quite without a heart. There is something large and incoherent in him. It is the English way, I think. Mr. Cecil Rhodes. Napoleon was clear fire. He speaks slowly, as though his tongue were a chaff-cutter chopping off bits of mind. He said 'Papers take the place of thought and occupation in twenty-five million English people. They're as necessary as blood and air. I saw that. I gave the papers. I've been favoured. This land made things very easy. I've been able to do certain things. Latterly I've come to see that I'm leaving bad cards for the men who come after me. I don't know what's to come to those men.' He was interesting about it. An American would have been crude. He agreed that you should be left in command. He wants to see you. I think he has a prejudice against your opponents. They are the biggest enemies he has. He is willing to keep on your papers, too."

She stopped speaking, so that she might search his face again. "How are you now?" she asked. Her eyes fell upon the revolver. The faintest wisp of vapour still curled from the muzzle. The weapon

pointed at her feet. He looked at the revolver. He picked it up from the floor, and stood doubtfully, facing her.

"The gun," he said. "I didn't know it was loaded." He caught her shoulder. "Are you tired out? You've been travelling? I'll get soup." He called to the servants. He waited on her. After she had eaten, he left the room. He stood stupidly in the bath-room wondering why he had come there. He swilled his face and hands under the cold water tap.

He came back to the sitting-room. He cleared the table, man-fashion, by putting everything on the floor. The revolver was gone.

"I've not done rashly?" she asked. "I've not presumed?"

He took her hands. He was biting his lips to hide his feeling. His wet hair was touzled from the towel. "Dear woman," he said. "Dear woman."

"You won't? You won't?" she said. He noticed her great burning eyes smiling at him while the brain behind them searched his face for danger signals. The heaps of feminine things upon the floor hinted at separation.

"She has . . . Your wife? Where is your wife?"

"It's a sad business," he said. "The East is wise. We've produced something unfit for life." He looked into his friend's eyes; she looked down.

"We must make something fit for life," she said.

"Let me see those papers," he said.

"Not here," she said. "I've telegraphed to my friend, Kitty Minot. I'm going down to Coln St. Michael to-night. You're coming, too. The train's at 10.45 from Paddington. You will be in bed by one. I'm coming to help you pack. To-morrow we'll have rested heads." He was over-ruled. They packed together. "Like packing for Ireland," she said.

"A year late for Coln St. Michael," he answered.

"All the warmer welcome," she said, "for your mother's son."

They did not talk in the train. It was freezing hard. An inch or more of snow had fallen. They sat together, using his great-coat as a rug. He listened to her steady breathing. Glancing at her, he saw her great dark eyes looking ahead.

"Cold?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of the future," she said.

"You may trust me not to spoil the future."

"I shall trust you."

"It's stopped snowing."

They got out at Coln St. Michael. A sleepy porter shambled along the platform with a lantern. He looked like the porter in *Macbeth*. Coming out of the night at them he seemed inhuman, they expected him to speak poetry. It was stinging cold on the platform. The train's yellow lights moved slowly away; the rear light faded to a point. The noise of their voices seemed very loud in that still place.

"Jarge 'aven't brought the cart, Miss Drummond," said the porter.

"We must walk, then," she said.

"I'll carry the bags," said Lionel. He picked them up, one in each hand. The other things could come on in the morning.

"You'll be tired out," he said.

"Not in this cold. I love the cold. The night's bettering."

Outside, the wolds lay white under the stars. The storm had blown by; the sky was frosty. Every star burned as though it were Christmas Eve. Far below, in the valley, St. Michael's brook fell drowsily, from a pool half frozen, down a fall half icicle. The snow crisped under foot. They set out up the hill to the cottage.

"Miss Minot will be startled," he said.

"She'll be delighted. She'll be sitting up." They tramped on up the wold, past houses, past farms where the dogs barked, past the church with its yews. The houses were magical in their beauty in the twilight of a snowy night. The ricks by the roadside looked snug under their conical tops, powdered with snow. It was freezing hard. Passing a byre they smelt the warm sweet smell of cattle. Hoofs rustled among straw; a cow breathed. The stars looked down. Heaven was thick with stars. The night burnt with eyes, souls focussed to a point of burning, watching the travellers.

"There's the Roman camp," she said. "Up above. You see the line of it."

"The Romans looked on this, too."

"This is their road."

"It makes the night strange," he said. "Souls as full of strangeness as ours have been walking here." He thought of the Romans. Old Rome is a forever blowing trumpet to the manly in men. "They marched and damned the baggage cattle," he said. "And slept on the hill there. Perhaps a man who saw Christ slept there."

"Perhaps a man who saw Shakespeare went to America."

"Perhaps a man who saw us will found a new religion."

"A religion for human beings, then. A religion of the holiness of life. We are all bread and wine at a sacrament."

"I know. But I don't see it so," he said. "We're passionate earth. We're worms sticking out our heads. Venice is only a worm-cast."

"We're earth with a spirit passing through it."

"A kind of filter?"

"Yes. Soul-strainers. I wonder if I am wasting this instant, under all those stars."

"The universe conspires for us, to-night."

"Doesn't the beauty of it make you tingle?"

"It makes me want to know. To know you better, first. Will you tell me about yourself?"

"Tell you the facts. It's the endeavour that counts."

"I want to know how you grew to be so beautiful."

"Beautiful?" she said. "It is what one strives for. A woman's life is just that one striving. To bring all the bad points under, so that the real self can come, and then to bring that under, so that the self beyond can come. And then to give it all to the world so that the world beyond may come."

"We make the world beyond."

"My friend," she said, pausing at a garden gate. "This is the cottage. Let us stop for a moment. There must be a consecration. Our friendship must be like this night. Give me your hand on that."

He gave his hand. They stood there for half a minute.

"You must speak it," he said.

"I only know a grace."

"Say that, then."

"Consecrate this bread to Thy service."

"Amen," he said. They entered the garden. Little dry flurrits of snow brushed from the yew boughs on to their sleeves. There was a smell of wood-smoke. The cottage windows glowed warm. The gate-latch clicked behind the friends as they walked up the little path.

"Kit-ty," Mrs. Drummond cried. A shadow passed across the lower window. There was a rattling at the door chain. The door opened, showing Kitty Minot. The light was mellow within the house, warm with welcome, friendly.

"Mary."

"I've brought Mr. Heseltine."

"Come in. Come in." The women embraced in the doorway. Lionel looked away.

"Mr. Heseltine's tired out," said Mary Drummond. "He must have my room. I'll sleep with you."

"Come in. Come in," said Kitty Minot, giving her hand.

"What a lovely blaze. How kind of you, Kitty," said Mrs. Drummond. "We've been nearly perished. Come in, Mr. Heseltine, and get warm by the fire." They sat down, all three, before a burning beech-log.

"Welcome home," said Kitty Minot.

There was a fragrance in the room, of rose-pourri and wood-smoke. On dressers at each side of the fireplace was the Minot china. A clock ticked, like Time's pulse. The beech-log, charred through, broke, sending up a shower of sparks. Something in Mary Drummond's face as she looked at her friend gave him a sense of being among eternal things, in a Rule of beauty, where peace was daily bread.

Life is a wild flame. It flickers, the wind blows it, the tides drown it. Perfect life, or that which we on earth call God, is no thunderous thing, clothed in the lightning, but something lovely and unshaken in the mind, in the minds about us, that burns like a star for us to march by, through all the night of the soul.

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